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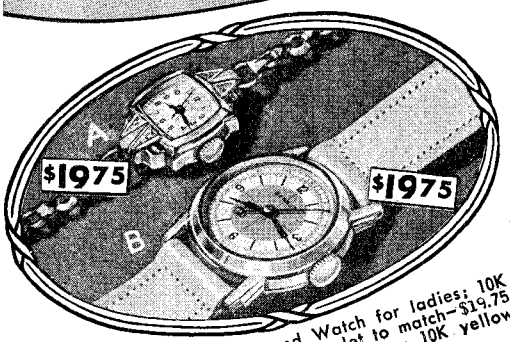

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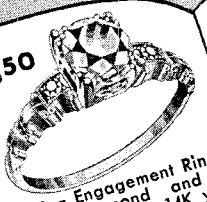

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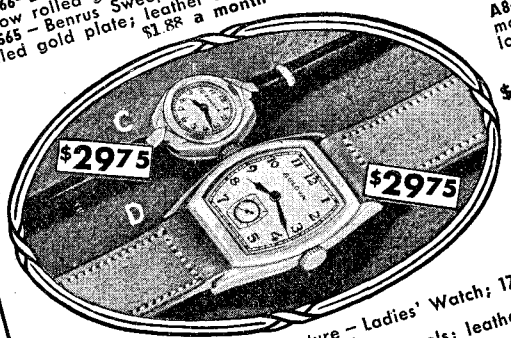

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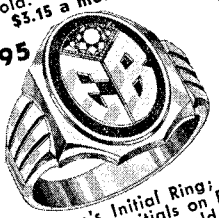

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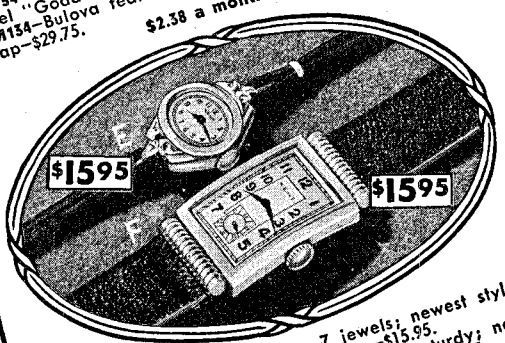

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America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

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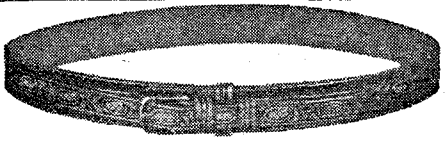

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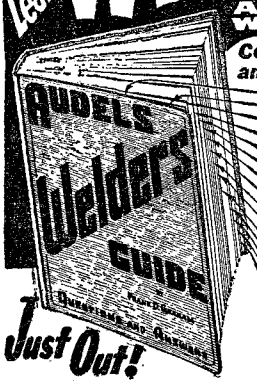

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Street of Swords

In those gay, dangerous days New Orleans was ruled according to the Code Duello; the grass was often crimson under the Dueling Oaks. It was an alien world to a Yankee engineer; but because he had a vision stronger even than love of life, he learned the language of the sword

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Warrior Alone," "Rebel Take Arms," etc.

CHAPTER I

RAILS RUNNING WEST

BACK there in the cypress swamp the sound of the shot came faint through the mosquito whine. Drew Martin vaguely recognized it. That was Johnny Pearse shouting, and Johnny wanted him. He picked up the transit and balanced it on his shoulder, turned splashing toward the bridge-head.

Pearse stood on the bank beside a Negro who rode a mule. "Feller from over to the Dupret plantation," he said. "Got a paper fer you. It's all written in French talk that I can't read."

"Let me see it," Drew Martin said.

It was an official document, carrying the seal of the State of Louisiana and the name of the parish printed at the top. The date was yesterday's, February eleventh, 1838. Here it is, Martin thought as he read. They've found a way to stop me and the road.

Down at the bottom was the signature of Maxime Dupret, and he smiled seeing that. Dupret had sold him the right of way through Bayou Latouche, but he hadn't known then that Dupret was the local sheriff.

"You were sent by M'sieur Dupret?" he asked the Negro on the mule.

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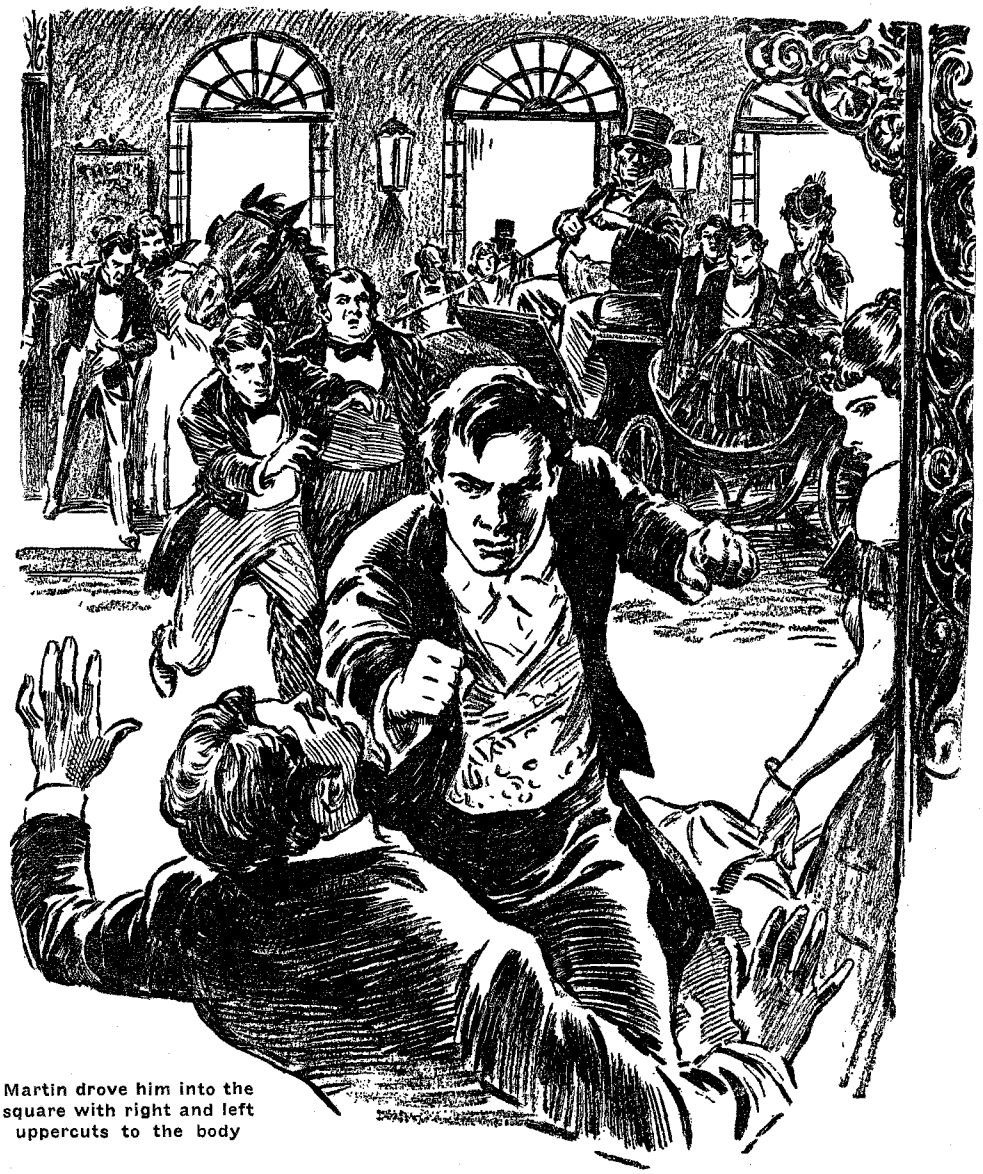

Martin drove him into the square with right and left uppercuts to the body

Yes, the Negro said in French, he was.

"Where is M'sieur Dupret now?"

"He left for New Orleans last night. He's a very busy man."

"So was I," Martin said, "until you came along." He stared over Johnny Pearse's broad, blue-shirted shoulder at the camp and the construction gang.

The men rested on their shovels and picks. The cook had his head out of the cook-tent door, and the big black charged with wiping down the *Housatonic's* brasswork had dropped his piece of waste. They were watching him with uneasy, sidewise glances. It wasn't hard even for a dollar-a-day levee black to guess what had happened. Railroads and Yankee engineers had the chances against them in the river country.

"I'm going over to the Dupret place,"

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Martin told Johnny Pearse. "This is a writ of restraint to keep us from putting the line across the bayou. But the man who petitioned for it didn't sign it. You keep the gang working. I want all that ballast in place by dark."

Johnny Pearse was a reformed Kentucky flatboat man. Martin had found him stupid-drunk and broke in a New Orleans bar. In eight months Johnny had given up his love of rum and the Mississippi, become the best foreman Martin had ever hired.

"They'll work," Pearse said. "They'll put that ballast in nice. But you'll be wastin' your time at the big house."

"I'm not so sure," Martin said. "The law can be used two ways."

He waited in front of the *Housatonic* while a horse was saddled for him. The engine was the pride of his life. He had designed it, practically rebuilt it when it was unloaded from the ship in New Orleans. With it he planned to start the first railroad west of the Alleghenies. From New Orleans to Baton Rouge, then to Vicksburg and Memphis, that was his dream.

He swung up into the saddle, waved impatiently to the Dupret Negro. "Come on, you," he said.

MOSS and creepers hung low where they rode. The sunlight was spangled across the puddles and butterflies as big as his hand flew gleaming from side to side. He didn't see them.

He was imagining the *Housatonic,* squat, brass-ribbed, strong, on the last grade into Memphis. The cypress sparks flung fat and red from the bell-shaped stack. The drive rods thrust with a powerful, even stroke. Then the crowds were there along the track, and the city was beyond. He was pulling down on the bell cord, grinning back at their cheers, and all the trouble, the fever and worry were forgotten.

"This way, sir," the Negro said.

The lawns stretched smooth to the plantation house. Each time he approached it, Drew Martin was impressed by its beauty. They had large, fine houses in his own New England, but nothing quite like this.

Pecan and live-oak and orange trees were around it. Wistaria covered the portico and the gallery in a rippling, fragile wave. Peacocks were on the lawns, and the servant woman who met him at the door wore a turban brighter than a peacock's tail.

"I want to see somebody who can speak for M'sieur Dupret," he said.

The servant curtsied and went down the dim and high hall before him. He followed her to where a door gave onto a side lawn. "Out there," she said.

A tall man and a young woman were playing battledore and shuttlecock on the lawn. An older woman sat a short distance away in the shade of a chinaberry tree, her head forward in sleep over her embroidery. The girl was quite pretty, Drew Martin noticed, and the man not what you would call ugly.

They both played the game well. Colour was sharp in the girl's oval, small-boned face, and her dark hair had shaken loose upon the collar of her frock. The man was in his shirtsleeves. He was sweating a bit, and his shirt hung close against his broad chest and arms. It was he who looked up and saw Martin, stopped the play.

"You seek somebody?" he said.

"Yes, I do," Martin said and came on down the steps. "I want to find the man for whom M'sieur Dupret issued the writ I have here."

The tall man glanced aside at the girl, talked to her in French. Then he advanced, the battledore still in his hand. "This is a private home," he said, "not a court of law. You'll have to go to New Orleans to find M'sieur Dupret."

"I haven't time for that," Martin said. "I'm busy building a railroad."

"Name's Martin, isn't it?" the other said. "I've heard of you. But now I must ask you to clear out of here. Take your troubles to M'sieur Dupret."

Martin spread his booted feet on the grass. "Just who," he asked, "are you?"

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"Collier Ledyard, formerly Captain of the Fourth Royal Hussars. I don't think you'd like it, old chap, if I were forced to call the blacks. Sorry, but you're being rude."

Martin took time to answer. He studied the Englishman and then the girl. "Perhaps," he said to her in his best French, "you can help me, *mam'selle?*"

"La!" she said, coming across the lawn towards him and Ledyard, "we have here a Yankee who can speak French. Where might you have learned that?"

"At Yale College," he said, then felt the heat rise in his face, for she was laughing at him.

"I'm Emily Dupret," she said. "My mother is of Yankee blood, so don't be afraid of me. Let's chat a bit, and don't mind Collier. It isn't often we have a real Yankee in Parish Latouche. Now tell me what's wrong with you and your railroad?"

"Louisiana law," Martin said. He watched Ledyard's eyes and the way they had narrowed, become wary. "It seems every time I cross a parish boundary I get tangled with another law. Now if you'll excuse me I think I'll be getting on back to camp."

"No," she said. "Mother would be vexed unless you met her while you're here. She's a Claiborne, you know, and her uncle was the first American to be governor of the State. Right, darling?"

The lady in the chair was awake. "Bring the young man to me," she said. She held Drew Martin's hand for several seconds. "You must be from the Connecticut branch of the family," she told him. "I met them when I used to visit summers at Newport and Providence."

"That's a fact, ma'am," he said. "My folks used to go over each July from our place at Cornwall." His slight feeling of unease left him. The presence of this prim lady in her black moiré gown was reassuring. She was one of his own kind; she brought all the North back to him. He hadn't known until now how he had missed it.

"You'll stay for luncheon?" she said.

"Thank you, no, ma'am," he said. He indicated his muddy boots and breeches. "I'm afraid I can't sit down at table like this. Some other time, if you'd be so good."

"Soon, then," she said. "There are not enough of us in this country, Drew."

He bowed low to her, crossed to the driveway. Emily Dupret and Ledyard stood there. Ledyard had signaled the Negro who kept his horse, and the Negro held it ready. "Goodbye," Martin called to them, then mounted.

"On your way to New Orleans?" Ledyard said as he passed.

"Maybe so, maybe no," Ledyard said in real Connecticut fashion. That, he decided, cantering out onto the parish road, was a man he didn't like one bit.

CHAPTER II

MASTER-OF-ARMS

JOHNNY PEARSE got the hand-car ready himself. He cursed the section crew who had used it last and he cursed the rain. "You be good and wet by the time you reach N'Orleans," he said. "No sense, you catch the fever again. Wait until the rain is over, skipper."

"I can't wait," Martin said. "I've got to pay this gang rain or shine. You want to come to New Orleans with me?"

"Take you in," Pearse said. "But I won't stay there. Place just about whipped me. Too many handsome gals and too much red-eye likker. These here mosquitoes is good enough fer me. Anyhow, you'll need someb'dy to look after the camp and the line while you're gone."

They worked the hand-car together. It was a profound pleasure for both of them to hear the smooth click of the wheels and see the glistening straightness of the rails behind them. They had made this. Their work and skill had gone into each foot of it.

"She ain't a bad job," Pearse said.

"Won't be when it's done," Martin said.

Out on the river a steamboat whistled. Her twin black stacks showed high above the mangroves along the bank. She went

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by fast, the thrash and thud of her paddle-wheels leaving a pulsant echo. "Plenty of power," Martin said. "So has the river."

"Sure," Pearse said. He spit neatly between two ties. "We got our troubles fer a certainty. But we don't have to buck no snags and bars and currents. We'll beat them fellers, and good."

. . . Rain had made the gutters overflow in New Orleans. Once on Chartres Street Martin had to stand back while a Negro killed a writhing water moccasin with a stick. There was a crowd in the huge-domed lobby of the St. Charles Hotel and the exchange room was packed from wall to wall. He pushed through and found Maxime Dupret in a corner.

Dupret stood among a group. He and a man in a gray beaver hat were quietly bidding against the others for a sugar cargo that had just come down-river. Martin waited until they were finished. "M'sieur Dupret," he said, "I'd like a few words with you."

Dupret was a small, sallow man who dressed carefully in expensive clothing. He flicked back his cuffs and asked, "More about your railroad?"

"Yes, sir," Martin said. He took the writ out of his pocket. "I was served with this, although I understood from you the title to my right of way was clear."

"A mistake on my part," Dupret said. "The title has been repurchased, and so I was forced to issue the writ."

"But who bought it?" Martin said. "As the sheriff up there, you should know."

A look of impatience came into Dupret's face. He shrugged. "If you would go to the Court House," he said, "you'd learn the facts of the whole matter. You are not questioning me further, I hope."

"No," Martin said; "I'm not." This was New Orleans, he remembered. Dupret was a Creole gentleman and as such could take protection in the *code d'honneur* any time he wished. If he asked Dupret one more question, the direct implication would be that he doubted the other's honesty. That might mean a duel, and railroads weren't built with pistols or swords.

He lifted his dripping hat to Dupret. "Good day, sir," he said.

"Good day, sir," Dupret said, and turned his back on him.

MARTIN stopped by the door to the barroom on the way to the street. It was gay, rang with laughter. Seamus Kerry stood on the bar. He was drunk and ready to sing. "Silence," he yelled. "Give an old dragoon silence in which to sing."

Then his wild glance caught Martin. " 'Tis the railroader, acara! Come in and drink a bitteen with me. Ye've the face of a parson, but the voice of an angel. Join me, ye hear?"

Kerry's companions pulled him to the bar. Kerry swayed down and put a glass of brandy in his hand. "Slightly drunk I am, Drew," he said. "I killed a man at the oaks this morning. 'Twas with the saber, and that's a thing I love. But the poor fool had no fight in him. Ye'll sing with me, and forget your bally railroad?"

"Name the tune," Martin said.

Kerry sang with his lean face lifted, his body straight. The room had become silent for him, and he let his high, sweet Irish tenor crest through it:

A Banshee peeler went one night
On duty an' patrollin'—Oh.
He met a goat upon the road,
An' took it to be a stroller—Oh!
With bayonet fixed he sallied forth
An' caught it by the wizzen—Oh!
An' then he swore a mighty oath,
I'll march yez off to prison—Oh!

Martin started the chorus full:

"Oh, mercy, sir!" the goat replied,
"Pray let me tell my story"—Oh!

They were all singing now, even the Creole dandies and the frock-coated sugar and cotton merchants. Kerry slipped down from the bar, took Martin by the arm. "Out of here," he said. " 'Tis enough I've had, and months since I've seen you. Come home with me."

"Who did you fight this morning?" Martin said when they were in the street.

"A Creole lad with more pride than

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brains. They're mad for the *duello* in this town. Do ye but bump one on the arm at the theater he's his seconds after you within the hour."

"But you go looking for it," Martin said. "You make your living by teaching them how to duel."

Kerry stared sidewise at him in the rain. "Man," he said, "I'm forty-three. For twenty-five years of me life I served as soldier. But I can make a living any which way. 'Tis them who choose to duel, not me. This is the richest town in the South, if not all America. A lot of these lads here have nothing to do with their time but make trouble. Ye should see Exchange Place now. Full it is with dueling masters and *salles d'armes* from one end to the other. You, though, have ye got your line to Memphis yet?"

"Not yet," Martin said. He smiled to meet Kerry's gaze. "We're having a bit of trouble. The line's hung up at Bayou Latouche. I guess what I need is a lawyer."

Kerry started another song that kept going until they reached Exchange Place. But he slowed at the corner beneath the big kerosene lantern swinging overhead. He pointed down the narrow and dark way.

"The Street of Swords, some of them call it. Few men are friends here. You and I are. We became so whilst you were still about the town. If it's a lawyer ye need, Titi Rosiere is your man. He was well-trained in the law at Bordeaux, and he's also friend of mine. Let us search him out. Then, we can drink in peace."

MARTIN had vivid memories of this place, but it had changed, he found. Now every house was occupied, and from nearly every one came sound.

Swords clashed and rattled behind the broad shutters. Men yelled in laughter, vexation or anger. A woman hummed a Spanish love song to the accompaniment of a guitar. Somewhere a bottle crashed and there was the steady, muffled repetition of pistol fire.

"Ye mark it?" Kerry said. "Even a practice pistol range for the buckos to learn how lead kills. Here's the *salle* I share with Titi."

He opened a door and they went down a long covered passageway, came out into a courtyard and climbed a flight of stairs. The second door gave onto a huge room. Crystal chandeliers lighted it, and a log fire in a hooded chimney place at the far end burned against the chill of the rain.

A dozen men and two or three women were around the room. Most of the men were in their shirtsleeves. A pair of them stood out in the center of the *salle* practicing lunges and parries with dueling swords. The women were pretty, Martin saw, and wore extreme, costly gowns. One of them sat on the knee of a slender-black-haired man. He got up to greet Kerry and Martin, dropped her on the floor.

"You come home almost sober," he said in French. "You shame me, Seamus."

" 'Tis due to me friend," Kerry said. "Gilbert Rosiere, meet Drew Martin. Ye may name him Titi as the girls do, Drew. He answers best to that."

Rosiere had a sensitive, intelligent face and a surprisingly powerful hand grip. "A pleasure," he said. "Any friend of Seamus is mine. You'd like a drink perhaps, and some food?"

"Aye," Kerry said. "Bring both. But 'tis a lawyer Drew is needing most. He's the railroader, Titi, the man who would build the line from here to Memphis. Ye had legal training before ye took to the sword. Do help him if ye can."

"No," Martin said. "I'll hire an *avocat* at the Court House tomorrow. This business of mine will probably take some time."

"All the more reason for me to help you," Rosiere said. "I have become bored with life—with dueling, drinking, gambling. I came out here to practice as a lawyer. But the Creoles, those of local blood and standing, got all the good cases. So I gave up the Code Napoleon for the *code d'honneur*. Now it would interest me to take your case, just to prove myself."

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"Arragh!" Kerry said. "Talk of it later, then, ye two. 'Tis drink I need."

KERRY did an Irish sword dance before dawn. He crossed sabers on the floor and leapt staggering between them. Then he tripped, dragged himself into a corner, lay there with a bottle. The woman and the other men had gone home; Martin and Rosiere were alone with him. He began to talk in a slow monotone of the men he had seen killed.

He described the fatal wounds of his comrades who had served with him under Wellington and Simon Bolivar. It seemed as though he were driven by some great inner compulsion to get those visions free from his brain.

"And mind ye," he said at last, "'tis not that a man kills because he wants. No. The lads with the money bags make him. Some, they fight better than the rest, that's all. Quicker at the killing, they are, so they end up with a bottle in their hands, not a sword. In those mountains with Bolivar, there in the Andes where the snow and the wind cut the heart out of ye—"

His head rolled down over the empty bottle. He was unconscious or asleep.

"Let him rest like that," Rosiere said. "He still might wake, want more drink."

"How long has he been drinking as much?" Martin said.

"For months. Most of the would-be killers in the town are after him. They resent the fact that he's an Irishman and not a born gentleman, and yet is an absolute master of the sword. If he dies, it will be because of the bottle, not the blade. But tell me of your case. Why did they stop your railroad?"

"They served me with a writ of injunction," Martin said. "When I saw Maxime Dupret, who signed it as sheriff, he told me that the title to my right of way north of Bayou Latouche is not in order."

Rosiere frowned and tapped the bowl of his long clay pipe. "An English combine is here in New Orleans," he said. "They're out to get possession of the steam packet service on the river. A lot of money is behind them, and they plan to take over the companies entirely, or at least supply them with all English-built vessels.

"You see, I've got various sources of information. The best people come to me as a *maitre d'armes*, if they didn't come to me as a lawyer. Are there any Englishmen up around Bayou Latouche?"

"One at the Dupret plantation," Martin said. "I met him yesterday. His name is Ledyard and he presented himself a former officer of Hussars."

"I know Ledyard," Rosiere said, "and I doubt if he has anything to do with the combine. He's your usual type of professional soldier gone a little bit to seed. He tried to set himself up here as a dueling master when he first arrived, but the competition was too keen. Then he met Emily Dupret somehow, and the gossips have it that they're engaged. There's another man, a heavy, dark-faced fellow named Ashton, who's supposed to be the head of the combine."

"Wear a gray beaver and a big Neapolitan cameo in his cravat?"

"Yes."

"Then I saw him today in the exchange at the St. Charles. They were dickering with some other men about a sugar cargo."

"Precisement," Rosiere said. "That would indicate Dupret might be interested in the steam packet deal with him. But let's get to bed. I'll go down to the Court House this afternoon and look over the records. Right now, though, I can say that I think Ashton and Dupret are trying to stop your railroad. You're their logical competitor."

Martin nodded. "I've already had that thought. But it makes out a bad case for Dupret."

"Some few of the Creoles still think they own all Louisiana," Rosiere said. "They live as they duel, without much thought for the future."

"I don't like it," Martin said. "I don't want to get mixed up in any trouble here."

He had lifted Kerry, was carrying him into a bedroom. Rosiere held the door open for him. "New Orleans isn't an easy

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town in which to live," the Frenchman said. "That's why Seamus and I go so often to the dueling oaks, and why this is called the Street of Swords."

CHAPTER III

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON, YANKEE

THE early morning street sounds awakened Martin. Negro peddlers slowly passed and shouted their fruits and vegetables, *"Bons petits figues! Barataria, Bartaria! Pistaches, Pacanes!"* An iron-tired water cart stopped at the outside door and a man filled the huge earthenware jars in the courtyard. Birds cried, a carrion crow sat black and ugly on the next roof top and whacked its wings.

Martin got from bed and went to the balcony. The wind had swung during the night, taken the rain. Now the city lay in a soft shimmer of reflected dawn colors.

" 'Tis me own head, that I know, and yet it sits on me like a squashed melon," Kerry said. He stood in the doorway behind, his face grayish beneath the beard stubble.

"Coffee will fix you," Martin said. "That and a bath and you'll be all right."

They stayed on the balcony while they drank the rich black coffee the servant brought. But the sun became hot and the sky heavy, and a foul reek rose from the sewers. "A lovely and a filthy city," Kerry said. "I like it."

"Why?" Martin said.

"One plain reason. 'Tis the last for me." Kerry's bloodshot eyes had cleared. His voice was grave. "Never will I go back to Ireland, or to England. Me folks are through with me at home, and after Waterloo there was no place for me in the English Army. Here I can live by me sword and still take pride in it."

"Last night," Martin said, "you talked differently."

Kerry took him hard by the shoulder. "Last night I was bad drunk," he said. "Ye'll see me other today. I've lessons to give to a score of the lads. Ye can stay and watch?"

"I might as well," Martin said. "Rosiere is taking care of my affairs for me."

He sat for most of the day in a corner of the big *salle d'armes*. This was a part of local life he had not witnessed before, and it sharply interested him. Kerry gave lessons in the rapier, the sword and the saber. His pupils were of various types, Creole gentlemen of French and Spanish blood from the city and the surrounding plantations, a river steamboat captain, and a big Texan who had fought against Santa Ana.

Kerry used a different technique with each of them. He was gay, serious and mocking by turn. "No," he told the river captain. "Would ye handle your craft like that while making a landing, man? Come at me. Aye—riposte, riposte. Now let me see you stretch your lunge all the way across the room."

Sun was broad in the room. It fell squarely on Kerry as he fenced hour after hour. Sweat streaked his chest. His eyes gleamed and the point of his blade was radiant. Once in a while his glance crossed to Martin.

He wants me to be proud of him, the great lunk, Martin thought. He's got the idea he must have my approval for what he does. But if I gave it to him he wouldn't change at all. His life was decided for him years ago at Waterloo, and Napoleon created a whole generation like him.

ROSIERE came in long after dark. His plum-colored coat was rumpled and there were dust marks on his silk waistcoat. *"Ca marche,"* he said, sitting down beside Martin. "I've found it, the deed of transfer. This is how the business was worked. A freeman, a Negro named Jules Gadigue who had once been employed on the Dupret plantation, was deeded a few *arpents* of land years back by Dupret.

"All of the land was in a strip North of Bayou Latouche, in the swamp, and practically worthless. But Gadigue came to New Orleans and died here of the plague. So the deed reverted to the original owner, Dupret, through a clause in an

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old parish land law. Dupret failed to claim title, and ten days ago it was up by Ashton."

"Dupret can pretty well deny," Martin said, "that he had any knowledge of the purchase."

"Exacte," Rosiere said. "I had to go through immense stacks of old records to find the original deed. It was made in Spanish times, when the law was the governor's personal wish. But I took the responsibility upon myself to enter a show-cause injunction in your name against Dupret. Both as the sheriff of Parish Latouche and the man who assured you that your right of way across the bayou was clear, he should've known of the purchase. You may have to fight the case for months, and still I think you'll win it."

Martin tightened his hands on his knees. "Win or lose," he said, "I'll have to try it. Ashton's price to me, if I asked him to sell the land, would certainly be worth more than my whole railroad. I've got my line built right smack up to the bayou, and no place else to put it. How much do you want for handling the case, Titi?"

"When it's finished," Rosiere said, "we'll discuss fees. Now is the time for dinner, and tonight there is a new piece at the French Theatre. Come, Irish. Put on your best coat and cravate. You're the toast of the town for running through that poor fool."

They dined in the old Café des Emigrés below Dumaine Street. Kerry was greeted by shouts and offers of drinks. He laughed at the shouts, took the drinks.

"Here," he told Martin when they were seated at their table, "is where the *exilés* come, those who were chased out of Haiti by the black revolt. A proud lot, and they live in their memories, palaver by the hour about goin' back. 'Tis a long way, for them or any man."

An aromatic, strongly spiced soup started the meal. Then they ate shrimp and oysters, a lobster apiece. Martin groaned. "I'll go to sleep in the theatre," he said.

"Not after you've had a drink of this," Rosiere said. He held up his glass. *"Petit gouave* is the name for it, and you won't find a better."

The liquor had the color of amber, a sweet, heady fragrance and a bite like flame. They finished a bottle of it before they left for the theatre. All of them were a bit drunk and out in the street they sang.

Carriages, barouches and landaus jammed solidly in front of the theatre. Servants in livery lifted their ladies across the mud. The lamps glared on ruffling silk and bare arms. Gentlemen bowed, bowed again. Paris had given the pattern for this scene, Martin thought, but it could only take place in New Orleans.

Rosiere touched him lightly on the arm. "Watch out for Seamus," he whispered. "The young cocks crow loud in the foyer during the *entr'acte.*"

The play was *Mary, Queen of Scots.* It was performed with magnificence and many long speeches. Rizzio died in extreme agony while Mary wept and Darnley scowled, a jeweled and dripping dagger in his hand.

Kerry fell asleep after criticizing the way Darnley used the dagger. They had to shake him to get him out of the seat as the final curtain dropped. He was surly, grunted at some man who brushed against him in the aisle, and Martin and Rosiere kept close on each side of him.

THEY were in the foyer when Martin saw Emily Dupret. She was with her mother and father. Ledyard and the heavily set man, Ashton, were behind them. She gave Martin a quick, hard glance in answer to his bow, then spoke to her father and Ledyard.

Ledyard came straight across the foyer. He wore black broadcloth and a high stock, walked with a strut. "You," he said to Martin, "seem to have a habit of repeating your mistakes. I'm here to warn you not to create another. No member of the Dupret family wishes to be recognized by you."

The enormous meal, the liquor and the heated air of the theatre had left Martin with a headache. He stared slowly at Ledyard. "I don't quite understand you," he

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said. "Do you talk for the Dupret family?"

"For M'sieur Dupret," Ledyard said. "You're stupid, but not enough to forget that today you entered legal action against him. That is a reflection upon his honor as a gentleman. I advise you to withdraw it immediately. If you don't—"

"Shut up," Martin said. "Shut up, and go away."

Ledyard continued talking. His full-lipped mouth pronounced more words. Martin's anger was sudden and vast. It seemed that he had been waiting for months to hit that mouth.

He struck with a cracking left uppercut, so fast that neither Kerry or Rosiere could stop him.

Ledyard went backward. He raised his fingers and touched his bloody mouth. He called out in a high voice as Martin came forward at him, then struck back.

Martin took him into the street with right and left hooks to the body. The Englishman was strong and jarred Martin as he hit. He closed and they went rolling down under the carriages in the mud.

It was several minutes before the police reached them. Ledyard was unconscious then, his big body sprawled wide. "You haven't killed him?" a policeman said.

"No," Martin said. "I'm sorry, but he'll live." Mud smeared his face. A trickle of blood was down his scalp from where he had scraped it against a carriage wheel. He straightened up between the policeman and looked at the sidewalk crowd.

Seamus and Rosiere were held with in a thick wall of police. Dupret had taken his wife by the arm, was helping her into their carriage. But Emily Dupret still stood by the curb. Her face was very pale, and her eyes darkly brilliant.

"I hope you're all right," she said. "I hope you have a good night's sleep in the Cabildo. Even a man like you must accept a challenge, and Captain Ledyard will take care of you at the oaks."

"Thank you for the interest in me, ma'am," Martin said. Then the policeman pulled him away and down the street.

RATS chittered in the corners of his cell at the Cabildo. Next door, a Negro woman accused of selling love philters shrieked out her innocence. She was answered by a drunken sailor who had failed to be back aboard his ship before the curfew cannon.

"What they got you for, Jack?" the sailor asked when he had shouted down the Negress.

"Fisticuffs," Martin said.

"There ain't much in that."

"There will be," Martin said. He stretched out on the plank bunk and shut his eyes, tried to sleep. You were wrong, he thought. You shouldn't have hit that big fop. The thing for you to do was keep your temper, laugh him off. But now you're in it, and you've no one to blame but yourself.

He was afraid, he realized. The thought of going out there to the dueling oaks deeply frightened him. It didn't matter that he had never had any dueling experience. If Ledyard challenged him, the man must be given some sort of satisfaction. It was certain the challenge was going to be made. And there wasn't any doubt, either, that Ledyard had deliberately sought him out to provoke a challenge.

Martin rose and strode the cell. Refuse Ledyard, he told himself, and you'll have to leave New Orleans and Louisiana, give up the railroad. But accept and you'll probably get killed, at least badly wounded. You should've stayed in Connecticut where you belong. This isn't your country, no part of it. Only a thick-head like you would try to build a railroad here. These folks don't want such things. Their river is enough for them.

He was overcome with nostalgic memories of the Housatonic, his own river at home. He saw it when the ice was just beginning to go out in the spring and the ducks were flying north. There was a place he knew down near Cornwall Bridge where he stood one morning and counted eight deer splashing through the rotten ice. He had shot the big buck with his grand-

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father's smooth-bore rifle, but he left the fawns and the does.

Martin stopped and took hold of the cell door. He looked out into the prison yard. One of the guards carrying a lantern was coming from the jailer's office, and another man was with him. He recognized the second man. It was Ashton.

ASHTON stood spraddle-legged before the bars and offered him a cheroot. "Look here, Martin," he said. "Shouldn't be any hard feelings, not between you and me. After all, you're supposed to be an engineer, a chap who can figure things out and find the right answer."

"Keep your cheroot," Martin said.

Ashton nodded and lit it for himself. "Rather a scrape you got into tonight," he said. "You'll have some difficulty getting out of it. I've talked with Captain Ledyard, mind you, and he's very angry. He insists upon challenging you as soon as you're free from this place. Smells a bit, doesn't it?"

Martin had taken his hands from the bars, put them in his pockets. He kept silent, waiting for Ashton. The other seemed to relish his cheroot and have plenty of time. But his eyes were very keen in the half-light, and his words sharp when he spoke again.

"I'll get you out, young fellah," he said. "The whole thing will be arranged nicely if you'll listen to me."

"You want to know my price for the railroad?" Martin said.

Ashton laughed. "I've already calculated one of my own. But here's my proposition to you. That land up at Bayou Latouche is in my name, and will stay in my name. Try to buy it, or try to beat me in the courts, and you'll go broke.

"I know who your backers are in New York and Boston, just what money you've got behind you. It isn't enough, and even if it were, you couldn't build your road. You know about me, don't you?"

"A little," Martin said calmly. "You represent an English combine that wants to get a monopoly on the river trade. The men who sent you must be looking for more than that, though. I reckon they're after all the cotton business, too. Those new mills in Manchester and Leeds have been built with the idea of using Southern cotton. Well, they won't. My folks up in the North will use that stuff. American cotton will go to American mills."

Ashton lowered his glance and tapped ash from the cheroot. "That's strong talk," he said. "But it doesn't make sense. I'm here to give you a price on your railroad, pay you almost what you put ino it. Accept and get out, that's my advice to you. One of our ships, the *Stella,* is clearing tomorrow for New York. Make your deal with me and you can be aboard her. If you don't, you'll be forced to meet Captain Ledyard in a duel, or become such a laughing stock that even your construction blacks won't work for you. What say, m' lad?"

"Go plumb to hell," Martin said. "That's my advice to you."

"I'm afraid," Ashton said, "you'll visit there before me." He bowed and turned across the courtyard. The cheroot made a faint spray of sparks as he flung it down outside the jailer's door. Martin watched it until the glow faded. Then he sat back upon the bunk.

"You're scared," he whispered aloud. "But you stood up to him, and you'll stand up to Ledyard. Take more than them to make you run."

. . . Titi Rosiere was smiling. "I like to see a man sleep in jail," he said. "It shows that he is an essential philosopher. But I'm sorry I was so long getting bail for you. It took me several hours at the gaming tables before my luck was sufficient."

"There's no reason why you should've bothered," Martin said. But it felt good to be out of the cell and here in the street with the late night sky star-bright overhead. "I hit Ledyard because he needed a drubbing, and now I'm willing to go to the oaks to meet him. I'm scared, sure enough, but not too much to fight."

"Par exemple," Rosiere said. "You talk

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like all the young hotheads around the town. I thought you were here to build a railroad, not to get yourself stupidly killed."

"But who'll answer Ledyard?"

"Leave that to Seamus and me," Rosiere said.

"Where's Seamus?" Martin asked anxiously.

"At the *salle,* waiting for Ledyard's second to make the challenge. Don't worry. It will be arranged. You're a railroader, not a duelist. For you to fight the Englishman would be silly."

"Wait a minute," Martin said. He grasped Rosiere's arm. "I shan't have you or Seamus making any more sacrifices for me."

"*Ca c'est ridicule,*" Rosiere said. "It will be no sacrifice, but a pleasure. Now when we enter, do please keep silent. Let me and Seamus do the talking."

CHAPTER IV

CODE DUELLO

THERE was a crowd of men in the courtyard of the *salle,* and a greater crowd upstairs. Seamus Kerry stood before the fireplace, a bottle in his hand. He was faced by a scar-jawed man who spoke with a slight lisp.

Seamus came over and gave Martin a drink from the bottle. "Welcome home, acara!" he said. 'Tis an unclean clink, that one. We have in our midst yon lad who bears the proud name of Manuelito. A Spaniard he is, a native of Valladolid, and a duelin' master of more than small repute. He's come bearin' Ledyard's *cartel.* Ye'll refuse to accept, Drew."

"Why?" Martin said.

"Because Ledyard is not one for a green lad such as ye to meet. He'd kill ye quick, no matter what the weapon."

Manuelito had been watching them, now moved forward through the crowd. He met his heels and rattled off a lot of rapid French that Martin could not catch.

" 'Tis the *cartel,*" Seamus said. "He's making ye the challenge."

"Tell him I accept," Martin said, "if you'll be my second."

"I'll be more than that," Seamus said. He brought his bloodshot eyes slowly to Manuelito's face. "Ye challenge under the French Code. 'Tis satisfaction ye want with the sword, the saber and the pistol. Them is the three legal arms, accordin' to Article Ten.

"But the lad here has had no training in any of them. And there's also a local code, hey, Manuelito? I claim use of that, with all them present as witnesses and judges. Martin is one of me pupils, understand, and as such I can represent him on the field of honor. Go back and let yer Hussar know that. Say to him that I'll meet him at the oaks at dawn. The saber's me chosen weapon, but if he likes it'll be the pistol. *Hasta la vista, hombre.*"

The scar on Manuelito's jaw showed purple. He looked around the room at the other men. They were silent, motionless. "It is right?" he said. "That is allowed by the code?"

One big man reached out and shoved him toward the door. "Go talk to Ledyard," he said. "Surely, it's right by the code, and surely Ledyard is paying you to second for him."

A band of pain held close around Martin's brain. He saw the room unclearly, as if these men and their actions were not a part of his own existence. He wanted to call after Manuelito, tell him to stop. But he lacked the strength; the wound on his skull had sent a throbbing ache down through all his body.

Seamus held him erect, led him to a divan by the fireplace. "Easy does it, me boy-o," Seamus said. "That worked, it did. Ledyard will be fightin' no duel. He'll back down complete, or, lackin' that, he'll send Manuelito in his place. And him I'll handle fast and fine."

Martin dozed there by the fire. He was possessed by a confused dream in which passed scenes of Connecticut, the swamp at Bayou Latouche, swords, bloody bodies and pistol shots, then an image of Emily Dupret. He talked with her in the dream.

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He said that it was because of her and out of jealousy that he had struck Ledyard. It was kind of funny and quite stupid, but he might be falling in love with her.

A HAND touched his shoulder and he blinked up to see Johnny Pearse in front of him. "Come to find how you was makin' out," Pearse said. "Some fellers up the line brung in word you was mixed in a fightin' here. What trouble you got, skipper, one of them duels?"

"Seems like," Martin said. "But you got no reason bothering in it."

Pearse took a Bowie knife out from his trousers waistband. It had a bone haft and a six inch blade. "Back in Kaintuck'," he said, "feller wants t' fight, we fight with these. Take a hunk o' rawhide cord and tie up wrist to wrist. Then folks rightly know who's a yeller belly and who ain't. How about me tendin' to your trouble? I ain't never slit no Englishman's gizzard, but I'd certainly like the chance."

"You been drinking?" Martin said.

"One or two," Pearse said. "Mr. Kerry give me a couple when I come in."

"Then put that knife away and sit down. How are things up on the line?"

"All right enough," Pearse said. " 'Cept that there's news of a flood headin' downriver. Heard so at Bayou Latouche and the same here in town."

Martin swayed to his feet. "Come along," he said. "You and I are going back to camp. If a flood ever gets over the levee and into that swamp, we'll be washed out for good."

Most of the men had left the room, and those who remained sat at a card table with Kerry and Rosiere. "I can't stay any longer," Martin said to them. "Call off that duel. It's senseless unless I meet Ledyard personally. My foreman says there's a flood coming up-river. I'll have to be there to protect my line. You tell Ledyard that if his sense of honor still worries him to come see me. I've got a rifle there at camp that I know how to use. He can have a dose out of that as quick as he asks for it."

Kerry and Rosiere both stood, kept him from the door. "There's no need for hurry," Rosiere said. "This man here is M'sieur Bellay, the editor of the daily *L'Époque*. He has also had news of the flood, and talked an hour ago with several river captains. It won't be anywhere near your line for some time.

"Wait, and enjoy yourself. The details of the duel are all arranged. Ledyard refused to fight Seamus, and Manuelito has accepted for him. Very nice, *n'est-ce-pas?* Ledyard proves himself cowardly by his refusal, and Seamus gets a chance to practice his skill with the pistol."

"The whole thing is stupid," Martin said. "Why should anybody fight? I whipped Ledyard last night, and I'll whip him again the next time he wants to tangle with me."

The little, bespectacled man indicated as M'sieur Bellay made a wide gesture. "The river," he said, "and the *code duello* are the two best sources of news for my paper. There is reason behind it; they express the significance of our existence. What would New Orleans be without spirited and courageous men to curb and overcome the power of the river?"

"Shucks if I know," Martin said. "But when are you supposed to fight, Seamus?"

"Six o'clock exact," Seamus said. "Do sit down and have yerself a drink. Titi and Bellay are to be me seconds, but at *piquet* they'd take the boots from me feet."

The card play came to an end at five o'clock. Kerry got from the table and returned with a pair of dueling pistols in a beautiful red Moroccan leather case. "Take a look at them, Drew," he said. "Ye're a man who knows good metal when ye see it."

The pistols were superbly made and balanced. Their octagonal-shaped barrels were a full ten inches in length, Martin calculated, and the percussion locks and delicate triggers were the work of a master craftsman. "Designed fer me by Purdey of Oxford Street, London," Seamus said. "Ain't they the dandies, though?"

"Yes, they are," Martin said. It gave him a cold, tight sensation at the pit of his stomach to examine the pistols. These were

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meant for the killing of men, he realized. Death had been the motive that had created their design.

"Seamus," he asked, "can't it be stopped? I'd no thought I'd be getting you into a duel when I put my fists on that big yawp-mouth."

Seamus grinned. "Did I listen to lads like ye," he said, "Titi and me would be starvin' within the week. Get over it now, ye hear me? There's little I have to fear from Manuelito."

IT RAINED on the way to the oaks. They went in two carriages, the surgeon with Johnny Pearse in the second. None of them talked, and the sounds were the clopping of the horses, the creak of wet leather.

Seamus had become tense. He no longer grinned, sat staring straight ahead down the rain-misted road. He's alone from all of us, Martin thought. Seamus is the one who's going out to meet death. But you started this, you fool, and now you're being carried along willy-nilly. You can't help him or help yourself. It's time you learned; everything is different here. A man pays for being a gentleman in Lousiana, and the price is the *code d'honneur*. Like it or not, you'll have to take it. You sure won't quit, you won't head back home before you're really whipped.

The dueling space was a wide, flat field where spiked Spanish bayonet plants bordered the famous oaks. Moss clung to the oaks and in this silvered rise of dawn the rain made them huge and vague. Manuelito and his party were already on the field. They stood at the opposite side, and Ledyard was among them, Martin saw.

Rosiere and Bellay were going out to meet Manuelito's seconds. They talked in careful, level voices. It was to be a duel according to the French code, of the type called *au signal,* and fought at fifteen paces. The weapons were inspected, chosen, the distance marked.

Seamus had taken off his coat and waistcoat. His hairy barrel chest showed bare inside the shirt. "Have a drink ready for me, lad," he told Martin, "and no fear about this." Then he strode stiff-legged to the mark, the pistol held lowered in his hand. Manuelito moved as soon as he started, but came more slowly to the mark.

"Recollect, gentlemen," Rosiere called, "that honor demands that you should only fire upon the third signal being given; that you are not to raise your arm until the first signal, and not to fire until the third. I am now going to give the signals, which will consist of three claps on the hand."

He brought his hands smartly together. The sound was sharp in the rain, echoed from the oaks. He gave the second clap and the pistols raised. He clapped again and they steadied.

Martin watched Seamus Kerry. All of his conscious nature was intent upon Seamus. That shirt was too white, and Seamus was too big. It was impossible for Manuelito to miss. But there was no sound of a shot, nothing but a quick click.

He looked at Manuelito. The Spaniard had lowered his weapon, was pulling back the hammer. It had been held at half-cock, and he had tried to fire it that way. Rosiere was shouting. Bellay and Manuelito's seconds across the field joined him. They told Manuelito that he could not fire now, did not have the right after he had once pulled the trigger. It wasn't proper, they said, and an extreme violation of the code.

Manuelito lifted the pistol and it cracked with a streak of vermillion flame.

Seamus had been standing lightly balanced, his body sidewise to Manuelito. He dropped to the right as the bullet hit, down on his knees, then his face. He made a groaning, cursing noise. "Why, ye odmadhaun," he said.

The wound placed a dark blood mark along his hip. It was his left hip and he touched it with his left hand. He kept the pistol in his right, up and clear from the grass. He began very gradually to stand erect. "Don't run, Manuelito," he said, "I've two minutes for the job."

Manuelito was backing from the mark. He had dropped his pistol, and his fingers were laced across his chest. A tremor went through him; his face was like a starched

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mask that had been crumpled by the rain.

Seamus let go a long, sighing breath as he fired. He didn't wait. He swung toward the side of the field before Manuelito fell. The bullet took Manuelito in the throat. He screamed once and kicked the turf in agony.

Martin saw the seconds carry the body away to the carriage. He experienced no emotion; it had been exhausted during that instant when Manuelito fired. He worked dully, helping the surgeon dress Seamus' wound, and the brandy he took from the bottle that was passed around was brackish in his mouth.

"Ye have no liking for the oaks?" Seamus asked him.

"No," he said. He was gazing out to where Ledyard stood with the men who covered Manuelito with a cape. "If I have to settle a score it won't be here. This isn't my style. I'll take him again with my hands, or—"

"Go on," Seamus said. "I've heard other men talk the same. Don't be embarrassed that it was me who was yer champion today. I wouldn't ha' fought hadn't I liked. Maybe ye think this was some sort of murder, but ye'll be comin' here in yer turn. Mind ye, Drew; ye'll come."

"You're sure?" Martin said.

"That I am."

"Then," Martin said, "I'd better get back to Bayou Latouche as soon as I can. The farther I am from here, the better I'll be."

"Have a drink," Seamus said. "To us, and to a long if sorry life."

CHAPTER V

NO SONG WILL SOOTH THE RIVER

PARTIES of planters met Martin and Johnny Pearse all along the line north of New Orleans. They were frankly worried by the river rise, and they wanted to know what Martin thought about it. "You took the surveys through here," one of them said. "You know the levels. How does it look?"

"Bad," Martin said. He pointed to the drainage ditches beside the roadbed. Water widened out from them into the fields beyond. "This rain lasts another day, something's going to go. But Bayou Latouche is the worst spot roundabouts. That bend up past the Dupret place makes a pocket the river can catch hard. A break-through comes there, it'll swing into the swamp and then right this way."

The planters stared from him to the river. The river could be heard. It made a great, slow sibilance. Logs knocked against uprooted trees in dull repercussion. Bank mud slid splashing.

"What are you planning to do?" the same man, Vaubin, asked.

"Put my crew in to build up the levee at the Dupret place," Martin said. "You'd better send your folks to help. I'll have my engine and a couple of flat-cars back down here by noon. Tell your *commandeurs* to bring all the loose sacks they got."

"We will," Vaubin said. "But are you sure Dupret is willing to let us on his place?"

"If he doesn't," Martin said, "he'll find his house and crops out in the Gulf. See you later."

The Negroes of the construction gang sat hunched in their puddled tents at the camp. "On your feet," Martin told them. "We've got a job. Get your tools and follow me."

"Flood comin'?" they mumbled.

"It's here," he said. He left them to help Johnny Pearse get up fire under the *Housatonic's* boiler, then turn the engine around on the switch-back.

"I'll handle her fine," Johnny said. "Ain't no place to turn down there, but I'll just back her home. You headin' over to the river now?"

"So. You bring those folks over, directly you fetch them here."

Part of the road leading to the Dupret plantation was already inundated. Crows were in sodden rows on the branches of the cottonwood trees, and all the small game had deserted the swamp. Even the muskrats had crawled to higher ground and red deer hid nervously in the bushes.

He walked fast in front of the gang, an axe helve hung with half a dozen lanterns across his shoulder. This was going to be a

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long and difficult job, he recognized, but the thought of it pleased him. He was where he belonged, at the sort of work he did well. The planters down the line had respect for him. When the river was licked he'd have customers among them, haul their freight to town.

He turned to the heavy-plodding column. "Sing," he said. "Let's have a song."

The mulatto cook started the singing. It was more chant than song, deep and repetitive, with a threnodic undertone that was purely African:

Ca me coupe,
Ca ma coupe, ca!

They meant the river. The Mississippi was the most powerful force in their lives. They had seen its destruction, spent years of their lives building levee against it. Now they were once more on their way to work, and they sang to let the river know they were coming. Martin lengthened his stride. He had a good lot here.

A CARRIAGE drawn by sweaty horses was at the steps of the Dupret house. Dupret was on the porch taking off a cape. His eyes widened as he saw Martin and the men. "You've come to help?" he said.

"Yes," Martin said. "I reckoned you'd need us, and what happened in town has got no dealing with this job. River jumps the levee, why, we both lose. Where's your crew?"

"Out at the levee," Dupret said. "I just arrived. But you—"

"I'll get along all right," Martin said. "More people from down-river will be here soon. I sent a train to fetch them."

Dupret came down the steps. He stood bare-headed in the rain. "You're a man I don't understand," he said. "Your entire way of thinking is beyond me."

"Connecticut folks are called queer sometimes when they're not well known. We make sense in our own way, though. You got plenty of sand-bags out at the levee?"

"Yes," Dupret said. "Yes, I think I have. My foreman is in charge there, but I'll go out with you."

The sound of the river had changed in the last few hours. It was harsher, more violent. The sweep of slate-brown water was very swift. Tangles of dislodged trees swung in to crash against the bank where the Dupret field-hands worked. Their foreman was a Frenchman and he was open in his welcome of Martin.

"A crevasse has started," he said. "Right here, where the current swings in from around the bend. I've built up against it all I can, but there's always new holes."

Martin stepped to the edge of the levee and studied the water there. An eddy hurled a funnel-like wave at the sand-bags, dragged them out of place one by one. He looked down the back of the levee. The sandy soil was covered by three or four inches of slate-brown water, the same color as the river.

"You've got a first class pot-hole," he told the foreman. "We'll have to fill in from way behind to keep the levee solid."

"I haven't got enough men and time," the foreman said. "My idea is to keep plugging each separate break."

"No good," Martin said. "The whole thing will cave on you. My crew can start filling in right now. In another hour, the train will be back with the down-river folks. Then I'll lay a spur out here to carry our dirt. We'll do a lot of digging, and we'll lay a piece of track pretty fast, but we'll stop the river." He glanced around at Dupret. "Does such make sense to you?"

A slight smile came into Dupret's fatigued face. "I can only offer you my compliments," he said, "and my best wishes for success."

THE gang started right there at the levee. They piled earth into the pot-hole and tamped it down, shored the retaining wall with beams and sand-bags. But the river came on through, surged upward like an immense well.

They filled and filled again, and saw their work collapse. Martin was very glad when he heard the *Housatonic's* high-noted whistle blast. Now, with the others from down-river to help, there might be a chance.

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It was a small one, though, and the river was sure big.

He talked shortly with Vaubin and with Dupret's foreman and the rest of the planters. "Man power isn't enough," he said. "I aim to build a branch line out here, then bring in whole train loads of earth.

"You fellows divide up your crews. Keep half of them here to do what they can to hold the levee. Send the balance to get Dupret's mules and oxen. I want loose earth dragged up here along the line I'll show you. Then by the time I've got my track laid we'll be able to give the river a real good tussle."

They worked all that day, and all that night. He was in the cab of the *Housatonic* most of the time, sending her forward as Johnny Pearse and the crew laid track. The track was rough, built with most anything they could find for ties. But he kept the engine and the string of high-sided cars going and on the rails, and the word from ahead was that the levee still held.

After dark the slave women lighted their way with torches and big iron-grilled contrivances full of pine knots that reminded Martin of corn-poppers. They gave a weird, uneven illumination. The faces of the men showed sweat-shiny, and their eyes distended. Mules hauling the drags that dug the earth whinnied with weariness. The stolid, slow oxen moved steadily, the goads making a wet, slapping sound across their quarters.

Martin got down from the *Housatonic* when the track was across the Dupret driveway, and he went at a stumbling run to the levee. He'd gambled everything, he told himself once more, to meet the river before it reached its high point. There wasn't much time left. The oxen and mules hauled plenty of earth, but not enough to count, and he needed another full hour to get his cars close enough to dump here.

Water rose yellow-bubbled through the mud and ooze at the bottom of the levee. A new crevasse was beginning there, Vaubin told him. Another few minutes, maybe a half hour, and the whole works would go.

"No," Martin said. "We've got more time than that. Don't get frightened. Just keep on piling in your fill. Give me a retaining wall of timbers right here, where we're standing. Then I'll dump my loads in between, and solid to the levee."

Emily Dupret was standing beside the *Housatonic* as he returned. She wore a long cape against the rain and behind her were a lot of servants carrying trays of food. "Is there a chance?" she said. "Can you stop it?"

"I hope to, ma'am," he said, and swung up into the cab.

THE *Housatonic* went off the tracks at the edge of the fill. A tie-plate jerked loose and a rail buckled, wrenched whining up against a piston box. He heard it, saw it, and jumped in time. The engine nearly pitched on top of him and coals from the furnace flung out to sear his shoulders and back.

"Darned," he said, "if we haven't got to put that back now." He waved to Johnny Pearse. "Fetch all the lads, and the mules and oxen. This here's our biggest hauling job yet."

He rove a sort of cable out of the chain traces and a length of rope Pearse brought. Then he climbed up on the *Housatonic* and made the end fast about the drive-shaft. It gave him a sensation of physical sickness to see the engine there like that. He had the desire to weep. He talked to the *Housatonic* aloud, as he would to himself. "Come on," he whispered as the men and animals heaved on the cable. "Come on; we got real work to do!"

The engine skidded, lurched, raised a bit. A shout came from the men. They strained at the cable, their feet slipping and shuffling. But the sheer weight and strength of the oxen helped. One wheel lifted clear, lowered into place on the rails, then the other. Martin sprang back from where he stood thrusting at them with a long pole.

"All right," he called. "Give me wood for my fire, Johnny. Now we finish the job."

He ran the *Housatonic* repeatedly back and forth over the piece of track to the

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levee. He dumped load after load as the Negroes and their masters worked side by side to level and fill. From up there in the *Housatonic's* cab he was able to watch the river.

It was rising, and it would rise more. But he knew that he had whipped it. The fill was sound between the retaining wall and the levee. Even if the levee cracked now the retaining wall they'd built would stop it. He jumped from the cab, scrambled up onto the levee.

The river passed in awful majesty. The surface was thick with flotsam that groaned and shocked and roared. Eddies swept in, hurled along the levee and then back from it. He stretched his arms and smiled. "Got you," he said. His weariness was so great that he felt intoxicated. He turned and looked at the people behind and below him.

Emily Dupret was there. Her father was with her, and Ledyard. Just when he'd first seen the Englishman here, Martin couldn't recall. But Ledyard had been working ever since; he had taken his orders quietly and handled one of the scoops well.

"We're safe?" Dupret said.

"We will be," Martin said. "The crest hasn't passed yet. It mayn't for perhaps quite a spell. I'm going to take a look at the levee up beyond the bend. You folks knock off. Best thing for you to do is get in the house and out of the wet."

He slipped and tripped going along the levee. His torch flame was fluttered low by the rain gusts, and he suddenly found he had reached the end of his strength. He squatted down on his haunches for quite a time, just listening to the river.

Out there in that vast chasm of darkness he heard people, animals. They were carried along on fragments of roofs and on trees, anything that would support them. A baby cried, a mule brayed. He started into the river as the baby's cry came to him. Then he stopped. He couldn't swim against the current. If he went into the river, he'd drown, too.

He rose and kept on up the levee. He walked rapidly, his brain still holding the baby's cry. This was the bend; the river was on three sides here. In the orange flutter of torchlight he saw a group of men ahead of him.

DIRTY, wet blankets were about their shoulders, and their hats were black with rain. They were Choctaws who lived and hunted in the swamp. He shouted and the tallest man came over to him.

"What's your name?" he said.

"Name of Sam," the Choctaw said.

"You the chief?"

"Sure."

Martin lowered the torch. The Choctaw had bluish tatto lines from the corners of his mouth back to his jaws. But he was sober and his eyes were shrewd.

"I've got a job for you, Sam. This levee is all right now. But if the river rises another foot it won't be. Look." He bent and thrust a stick in between the sand-bags above the roiling water. "When the water gets to that, you come to the big house and tell me. I've got to get back there. You be certain and come, hey?"

Sam nodded. "Sure," he said.

Johnny Pearse was still running the *Housatonic,* bringing fresh loads of dirt up to the fill behind the levee. "Quality folks is all in the house," he told Martin. "Mrs. Dupret sent word out fer you to jine them."

"A drink would do me some good," Martin said. "You find one of our boys you can trust and chase him up to the bend to watch there. I've got a Choctaw watching now, but two's better than one. And you keep an eye on it here."

It was like a reception, Martin thought as he entered the huge, high drawing room. The ladies around Mrs. Dupret were dressed in taffeta and *mousseline de soie,* and some of the gentlemen wore their best coats. Over in a corner the younger folks stood around a spinnet and sang. He made his bow to Mrs. Dupret while the other ladies stared.

She presented him to all of them. "A relation of mine from the North," she said. "One of my cousin's folks." Then she gave him a gay little wink. "Join them at the spinnet, Drew. Have a glass of punch and

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a bit of fun. I understand you're really the man who kept the river back from our door tonight."

"It wasn't much, ma'am," Martin said. "We all did our share."

Emily Dupret played the spinnet. Ledyard turned the pages of the music for her, his head down near her dark hair. She looked up as she finished a piece and waved her hand to Martin. "What's a Connecticut song?" she said. "You can't sing hymns all the time."

"We don't," Martin said. He was looking at Ledyard, and his fingers were tight about the punch glass.

Ledyard had straightened at Emily's side. He lifted his glass. "A toast, sir," he said to Martin. "We're indebted to you for what you've done tonight. Let me here beg your pardon for any unpleasantness between us in the past."

"Thank you, sir," Martin said. The man's slick as a whistle, he thought, and he's a liar. First chance he gets, he'll be after you again. He glanced at the rest of the group, then at Emily. "Our songs up home are mostly the old ballads. One, now, is *Skipper Ireson's Ride*. We sing that at husking time, and at sugaring off, in the spring. But I've heard some nice songs down this way, too."

"Will you sing us *Skipper Ireson's Ride?*" she said.

"I can't, ma'am," he said. "I've got to go back out there shortly. The river's still on the rise."

"Take me with you," she said. She stood and pulled her shawl about her shoulders. "I want you to tell me how you held the levee."

"Emily, I suggest that you stay indoors," Ledyard said in a stiff voice.

"Play your suggestions on the spinnet," she said. "Maybe I'll hear you at the levee."

She took her cape from a servant in the hall, but the spatter of rain on the porch soaked her slippers. "Carry me," she told Martin.

He strode with her held high in his arms, her cheek against his shoulder. "Why don't you like Captain Ledyard?" she said.

"For the same reasons you don't."

"But I like him very much," she said. "I'm affianced to him."

"That proves nothing to me," he said. "I doubt if your engagement will last."

She turned in his arms so that she could look at him. "You're bold," she said, "and badly mistaken."

He did not answer. He was letting her down to stand upon the levee and beyond them the river raced.

IT STRAINED at the levee. The fury and the majesty of it took all his thought. This came from the ends of the continent, from Canada and the great mountains to the West. He thrust his hand into the river and measured the rise since he had last been here. In a few more minutes the crest would pass. The rise was almost up to the one foot level.

"You admire the river," she said.

"Yes," he said. "I guess there's no other like it in the world. It comes rolling down from far. I can name off in my head all the rivers that make it."

"Name them aloud," she said.

He grinned. "There's a lot. But some are the Judity, the Grand, the Skunk and Salt. Then there's the Licking, the Green, and the Red, the Yazoo, the Missouri and the Ohio, the Cumberland."

"You turn them into music," she said

"They are music," he said. "Listen Here comes the crest."

The wave held from bank to bank. It spumed with a livid froth and it shuddered the earth. They could see no further than a few yards out, but they could feel its force through their bodies, and the murmurous rush of the passing was a tremendous sound.

She gripped his arm. "It's gone," she said. "We're safe."

"I reckon so," he said. He experienced an elation that was like nothing else in his life. "There'll be a day when I put a bridge across that river. I'll build road out into the West, beyond St. Jo's and through the buffalo country, and over the big mountains smack to the other ocean."

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"Then you'll have to stop," she said. She was smiling at him.

"About then," he said, "will be time for me to come back here to see you. I'll—"

He swung around.

Johnny Pearse was running towards him across the fill. The lantern he carried cast light up into his haggard face. "River's busted through up at the bend," he said. "Right where you told the Choctaw to stand, and where I sent our boy."

"What happened to them?" Martin said.

"Can't find neither of them," Pearse said. "But the river is rightly through and playin' hell. It's down a'ready on the land this side the swamp. What we goin' to do?"

"Stop it," Martin said. "Call the gangs and start them up there." He glanced at Emily. "I'll have to take you to the house."

"No," she said. "I can get back myself. You seem to find more pleasure in squiring me than in protecting my father's land."

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT SWAMP

WATER reached his knees and waist as he went to the bend. It gushed spreading out, whirled in a wave over the cotton and tobacco. But then it slowed, settled in shallow wideness. There wasn't enough coming through, he saw, to cause any really serious damage. The break had come after the crest was by down-river.

He waded up onto the levee, found the break. A ragged hole about fifteen feet across was torn among the sand-bags. The flow in from the river was sluggish. It could be checked as soon as the hole was plugged. The worst damage was done: several hundred acres of Dupret's prime sugar and cotton land below the levee were flooded. All those crops were mired deep in silt and completely ruined.

Dupret came sloshing through the water with the work gang. He was pale and furious. "How did this happen?" he said.

"I've got an idea," Martin said slowly, "that it didn't break by itself. This part was good and sound half an hour ago. I was up here and had a look at it."

"Did you leave anybody to watch it?"

"I left a Choctaw by the name of Sam, and my foreman sent along another man, a black from our crew."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know," Martin said. He gazed out over the inundated land. Cotton plants lay flat under the silt. That and the tobacco beyond were completely destroyed. When you tried your very best, he thought, you got licked in this small, cheap way.

More men, Vaubin and the other planters and Ledyard, were moving up the bank. They walked with cautious strides and close together. Some of them carried rifles or pistols, held them ready in their hands. This was a different crowd from the one at the house, Martin sensed. Now they were suspicious of him, the stranger; they would be quick in their condemnation.

"We want the truth from you, Martin," Vaubin said.

"I've been telling the truth," Martin said. "I don't know what made the break."

"But you were here half an hour ago," Dupret said.

"Yes, I was."

"And you say you left two men to watch the levee?"

"That's right."

"Nobody but yourself knew about those men, though."

"My foreman, Johnny Pearse, did."

"Your foreman," Dupret said. "Why should we trust him, or you? My best land has been flooded, my crops ruined. But your line is safe. The flood didn't reach anywhere near that."

"Hold easy," Martin said. "I've been working all day and night to save your land. Now you make me out to be a man who started this break-through here on purpose. What reason would I have for that?"

Dupret laughed. "Several," he said. "You've got a suit against me in the New Orleans court. A friend of yours fought a duel and was wounded because of it last week. All the work you did on the levee down below was to protect your right of way, but not my land. You wanted my land washed out, and you succeeded."

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"You figure me wrong," Martin said. It was difficult for him to speak and keep down his temper. "After we've got the levee plugged and I've found the two fellows who should have been here, I'll prove it to you."

"Don't bother," Dupret said. "We'll take care of the levee, and we'll take care of you if you try any of your tricks again. Get out of here."

MARTIN stood very still. His muscles were tightening along his back and arms. He looked forward into the group at Ledyard. It was his intense desire that Ledyard would move, make some menacing motion. But Ledyard remained motionless, faintly smiling.

"You heard M'sieur Dupret," Vaubin said. "Get out of here. We have no use for your kind."

Johnny Pearse's knife blade took a flat glitter from the torchlight. "You don't talk to him like that," he said. "You can't get to puttin' any sech language onto him. He done his best fer the hull lot of you. If he's a liar, so'm I, and I'll carve the man who says as much."

Martin caught him by the wrist. "No good," he said. "Let them be. You and I know who's doing the lying." He signed to the staring-eyed Negroes of his gang. "Collect your tools and clear out to where you belong."

He sat for hours alone in his tent at camp. The events of the day and night formed clearly for him. He saw them in ordered sequence. Whoever had planned to blame him for that break-through at the bend had been quite clever. It was a fact that only Dupret's land had been washed out, and that the fill job down below had saved the right of way.

The news would get to New Orleans soon and be the talk of the town. He'd be distrusted there. His case against Dupret was positive to suffer in court because of it. Louisiana judges didn't like a liar better than any man.

He came nervously to his feet, went to the door of the tent. The Negroes slept. Johnny Pearse was busy securing a tarpaulin over the *Housatonic*. "What you aim to do?" Johnny said.

"Pay off this crew so that they don't eat up every dollar I got left. Then I'm going to take a look for Sam."

"What do you think happened to our boy, Gros Moun?"

"I think Gros Moun got killed."

"By the fellers who made the break in the levee, you mean."

"That's right."

"Who do you think done the levee job?"

"Maybe Ledyard, for Dupret. That's what I'm going to find out."

"Then we'll have to head back in the swamp," Johnny said. "If Sam's alive, he's up in there. I know how them Choctaws act. I've hunted with them months on end."

"Who told you I was taking you?"

"Don't need nobody to tell me. You just pay off them boys, skipper, I'll h'ist along and get us a decent dugout canoe. Then we'll bring that Choctaw out o' there."

Martin had never been deep in the swamp. It was for him a fascinating and almost mysterious region. They sent the heavy dugout through patches of huge lily pads upon which frogs perched and chirped. Alligators lay gray-brown, somnolent among the mangrove roots while overhead herons swept like quivers of flame.

Martin looked up at the trees. Their creepered branches held out the sun. Here the light was vague, dim as twilight except where one tree had fallen and let a sheer beam lance down upon the dark water. "The Choctaws had their village right close," he said. "I marked it when I ran my survey."

"On that hummock yonder," Pearse said. "They ain't there now, but it won't do us no harm to take a squint."

Mussel shells and fish bones were scattered around the slab huts. The huts were empty, and the ashes of the fires were cold. But Johnny Pearse scraped through the ashes, pulled out the remnants of a hat. It was an old roraw, well worn and greasy with sweat. "That there was Gros Moun's," he said. "He was wearin' it when I sent him up to meet with Sam."

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"Sam couldn't have liked it much," Martin said. "Come on."

Darkness was swift. They stopped to light a torch and eat. "Skipper," Johnny Pearse said, "Choctaws ain't so handy with a gun, but still they got some. You goin' to keep on in the dark?"

"Correct," Martin said. He touched the long smooth-bore rifle at his knee. "I'm in a hurry, and I'm just a mite angry. But I'll stick the torch up here in the bow."

IT WAS near midnight, he calculated, when he saw the carmine reflection of the fire through the trees. He took his paddle from the water and Pearse let the canoe drift. "That's the lot," he said.

"Yeah," Pearse said. "And they know we're comin'."

The fire was on a low hummock grown with several tall trees. Canoes were pulled up as a shelter and nobody moved there. It was Martin's impression that the gun shot was very close. The bullet hit the water off the bow, splashed whistling in ricochet.

He took time when he fired. He put his bullet right into the middle of the fire. Sparks spattered golden. A man shouted.

"Put out the torch," Pearse said. "They can see you plain as a barn."

"I want them to see me," Martin said. "You get down flat. I'll handle this."

He brought the dugout straight to the hummock. Three more shots were fired at him, all high and wide. He got out of the dugout with the rifle in the crook of his arm. "You stay where you are," he told Johnny Pearse.

Sam stood by the fire. He was drunk and he staggered. A musket and a powder horn were behind him. "You going to talk, Sam?" Martin said.

"Don't know," Sam said.

"You know," Martin said, "that you killed my Negro. You killed him and pitched his body in the river."

Sam made a backward step. He talked in Choctaw to the men and women crouched by the upturned canoes. "Talk to me," Martin said. "Not to them."

He grasped Sam by the shoulder, made him stand erect. "Tell me why you did it."

"They give me rum and money."

"Who?"

"Tall man."

"You know his name?"

"No."

Martin tightened his grip and took the rifle by the barrel. "His name was Ledyard, wasn't it? And he didn't want you to kill the Negro. All he cared for was a break in the levee."

Sam looked down at the ground, and at the people of his tribe. "You give me rum," he said, "if I say the name was Ledyard?"

"No," Martin said. "But I'm going to take you back to Bayou Latouche."

"Name was Ledyard," Sam said. "Now you let me stay?"

"I reckon not," Martin said. "Now you go back for sure."

Johnny Pearse put buckskin thongs on Sam's wrists and ankles. "Got him tied tighter'n a hawg," he said.

"We'll have to keep him that way," Martin said. "He's kind of precious cargo."

HIS lack of sleep made Martin light in the head. He lurched against Sam as they walked up the driveway to the Dupret house. "Sorry, Sam," he said. "But you started this."

The Negro servant who came to the door ran full tilt back down the hall. Martin heard the excited rattle of her voice, then Emily's in reply. Emily had been out in the garden. She wore an apron and big canvas gloves.

"My father gave you warning," she said, "not to come here."

"I appreciate that," Martin said. "But I've got the man who made the break in the levee and killed my Negro. Speak up, Sam."

"True," Sam said. "That I did."

Color went out of Emily's face. It left dark marks high on her cheekbones. "You haven't hurt him to make him say that?" she said.

"He's been sober for about fourteen hours," Martin said. "Ledyard gave him a jug of rum and a few *piastres* for the job."

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"I don't believe you," she said. "I can't."

"You'd better," Martin said. "I'm taking Sam down to New Orleans. Where's your father, here or there?"

"He and Captain Ledyard are both in New Orleans. But you will do a very dangerous thing if you take this man down there."

"Why?"

She looked fully into his eyes. "Captain Ledyard," she said, "stands small chance of being convicted of a crime on the word of a drunken Indian."

"You're trying to frighten me," he said. He grinned at her. "You'd like me to believe that Ledyard will challenge me again if I bring in Sam."

"I'd like," she said, "for you to have enough sense to realize your danger. This time it will be impossible for you to escape from a duel."

"So I should cut Sam loose," he said, "and let him run for the woods. Not today, ma'am. We're on our way to town."

"You're a fool," she said.

"Surely," he said. "For wasting my time with you."

Johnny Pearse had oiled the hand-car, made a place where Sam could sit. "But let's catch some sleep first, skipper," he said. "Ain't no chance of us runnin' off the track in the dark, and there is of some feller takin' a shot at us."

"Are you scared," Martin said, "of what the girl told me?"

"Not rightly," Pearse said. "Still, I ain't too happy. Don't you ferget that Gros Moun got dumped in the river."

"Then clean and fill a couple of lanterns," Martin said, "and we'll go tonight. But you keep Sam in your tent."

The tree toads were in chorus down the line. After a time Martin got to think it was the only sound. It was louder than the wheels and the clanking of the handle. When the shot was fired he wasn't sure he heard. But Sam twitched where he sat, rolled sidewise—dead.

"Damn," Johnny Pearse said. "Damn me good." Then he jumped off into the ditch.

Martin followed him, but went on across the field to the grove of sycamores. The shot had come from there. He could smell the smoke, and the pale flash was distinct in his memory.

A muddy lane was behind the sycamores, led toward the river. He found the imprint of boots and the spent patch from the rifle. There was no use trying to make a chase, he knew. The man with that rifle was already at the river.

He went back to Johnny Pearse. "Gone," he said. "Must've had a boat waiting. Get up and we'll head for town."

"How about Sam?"

"We'll take him in. He'll be buried right, anyhow."

CHAPTER VII

SABERS ON HORSEBACK

SEAMUS KERRY said that he was very drunk. "I went after it hard last night," he told Martin. " 'Tis a lunk I am, nought else. But here I was down at the Veau Qui Téte having meself a bite and a bottle, and in comes Ledyard. He asks for drinks for all exceptin' me, and me he calls by name. So I goes to him and I gives him me hand flat across the cheek."

"You couldn't hold yourself back?" Martin said, almost whispering.

"No," Seamus said. "I knew what he wanted and I give it to him. He challenged me direct. We'll be out at the oaks at dawn."

A feeling of dismay and intense fear came over Martin. He stared through the shadows of the *salle* at Seamus. The man's face was gray-colored. Nerves flicked constantly at the corners of the wide, impulsive mouth.

"But you're in no condition to fight, Seamus," he said.

"That I know," Seamus said. "Yet it makes no difference." He got up from his chair and limped to the table, filled his glass with brandy. "I'm through. What's there left for me, lad? 'Tis lame I am since Manuelito put that ball in me hip. I can no longer stand here all day givin' lessons to the buckos. Ledyard was to blame for

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that. Now he can pay. He's asked for it to be with the saber, and mounted."

"Titi Rosiere won't let you fight, nor will I."

"Titi's gone now to talk with Ledyard. No good will come of it. Ye can't stop me, Drew."

Martin sat silent. A lizard crawled the floor and made a small rustling noise. The river breeze clacked the palmetto fronds in the courtyard. He wished abruptly that he were back in Connecticut. Life was very different there. Violence had no real part in it. But Seamus was his friend. He'd never had another friend like Seamus.

"You're right," he said. "If you're set on fighting, I can't stop you. Will you have a chance against him, though, with your bad hip?"

"Enough," Seamus said. He dropped the glass, let it crash on the floor. For many minutes he sat with his hands up over his eyes.

"I keep seeing them at night, Drew," he said. "All the time now. 'Tis a lot of them there are, too, those who're dead. They march, and counter-march. But their formation's terrible. 'Tis me they need to dress their ranks. I belong with them."

Martin took him by the shoulders, gently shook him. "Come out of it, man," he said. "You've got the brandy horrors."

Seamus looked up and his eyes were clear. "I've seen too much, Drew. Too much, I say. I was there at the stormin' of Corunna, and all through the Peninsula. At Waterloo I was near enough to see Boney himself, read his face.

"But there was more after. Simon Bolivar is one of them who marches in me head. He was a soldier greater than Boney. We fought them everywheres with Bolivar, out in the *llanos* with the mosquitoes as thick as smoke, and up in the snow mountains. But what come of it? He died of the lung complaint alone in some *Indio* hut at Santa Marta. So let me be. Let me go in me own fashion."

"I'll talk with Rosiere," Martin said. "You're my friend whether you like it or not."

ROSIERE came in with a lot of other people. They were dueling masters and quadroon girls from the section by the ramparts. Rosiere was grave, but the rest of them were merry, formed a laughing, noisy circle around Seamus.

"You've heard?" Rosiere said.

"Seamus told me," Martin said. "I've done my best to dissuade him."

"He won't listen," Rosiere said. "He's past the point of reason. But there's hope because he'll fight mounted and he's an excellent horseman. But tell me about yourself and what occurred there at Bayou Latouche."

"Ledyard had a hand in that, too," Martin said. "I caught the Choctaw who made the levee break for him. But the Choctaw got shot a couple of hours back as I was bringing him into town."

"Very interesting," Rosiere said. "It's without doubt now that Ledyard works for Ashton. They're following a regular scheme. Ashton has spread the story of the levee break all over town and so seriously jeopardized your law case. The witness who could incriminate Ledyard has been killed, probably by Ledyard himself. Seamus is next. Ledyard challenged him to arouse public favor further his way. If he defeats Seamus he'll be the hero of the town."

"If he harms Seamus," Martin said, "I'll kill him."

"You may have to do that," Rosiere said. "You're the man Ledyard really wants to fight. I've prepared a solid case for you and it comes to trial next month. Ashton's worried about your chances of winning it."

Several of the girls in the group around Seamus were singing. He stretched low in the chair and grinned at them. "Bring out food and more liquor, Titi," he yelled. "Then they shall sing us *Ouendé*."

The girls took off their turbans and their hair fell to their shoulders. One picked up a silver tray filled with figs, mangos and pomegranates, lightly balanced it. She started to dance in a measured rhythm while the others sang.

It was difficult for Martin to understand

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the Creole *patois* words, but the tune, the increased and wild tempo of the dance were magnificent. Now the men sang:

Mo pas barassé, macaya!
Mo bois bon divin, macaya!
Ouendé, Ouendé!

"It's a song out of Africa," Rosiere said. "It says to eat and drink enormously, and to go on and on."

In the hush at the end of the singing the ships' bells sounded sharp from the river. "Three o'clock," Martin said. "Seamus should get some sleep."

"He won't," Rosiere said. "He'll be this way until dawn."

The group was singing again and Martin joined them. Enjoy yourself, he thought. There's no purpose in playing sour-face. Seamus wants to fight. He'll win or he'll lose, and you can't change it. But he was right when he said your turn would come to go out to the oaks for a duel of your own. You know somehow, standing right here, that you'll fight Ledyard. Now's your time to drink and sing.

THERE was a high sun. The mists had left the ground. As the horses reared and turned they gashed up big green clods of turf.

Seamus Kerry rode a tall sorrel gelding. Ledyard rode a smaller but heavier bay horse. It was he who did the charging, made the first attacks. The sabers brightly whirled, then lashed and locked.

They fought mostly in mid-field. They brought their mounts quarter to quarter, erect in the stirrups as they made their blows. Seamus was wet with sweat. Veins were prominent in his forehead, his arms and neck. He seemed to tire, to fight with fury only when forced.

It was not his day.

Ledyard spurred the bay horse repeatedly forward. He was a superb horseman, just as good as Seamus. His attacks were bold, and savage, delivered with great skill. One thrust nearly took Seamus from the saddle; he saved himself by a desperate counter and a cut at the head. From that moment the fight became unequal; the advantage was Ledyard's and he pressed it hard.

His strokes tooked on added vigor. He slashed time after time at Seamus, hurling his horse right in against the sorrel. The sorrel staggered and Seamus failed in a stop-cut.

Blood was over Seamus's shirt from the shoulder to the waist. The wound was in the shoulder, deeply gashed. He could no longer use that arm, held his saber in his other hand, guided the sorrel with the pressure of the knees alone.

All his sense of calm went from Martin as he saw the wound. This was wrong, too cruel to last. It should be stopped right away. He spoke to the people around him, told them it should be stopped.

They glanced vaguely at him. None of them answered. They sent their glances from him back to the men out there on the field. It was that which dominated, really fascinated them, the sight of blood, the approach of death.

Dupret was on the opposite side of the field. He stood beside Ashton in a crowd of men and several women. Cheers for Ledyard came from them. Handkerchiefs flickered in the women's lace-mittened hands. Their faces were haggard with the intensity of their emotion. Blood was on one woman's chin from the pressure of her teeth against her nether lip. For her and for the others, Martin recognized, this was more exciting than the theatre or Mardi Gras. Here was death, the greatest of all excitements and stimulants.

Martin pushed through the crowd on his side of the field. He pulled Titi Rosiere around by the arm. "Seamus is badly hurt," he said. "Isn't that enough to satisfy Ledyard?"

"No," Rosiere said. "*C'est à l'outrance.* They agreed to fight until one man or the other is unhorsed. But watch. Seamus is getting some of his own back."

Martin watched, fascinated.

Seamus had sent his horse into the full gallop. He rode with his saber lifted, gave a great cut at Ledyard's head. Ledyard made a yielding parry, low in the saddle.

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Seamus struck again, but this time in feint; his real blow was for the throat.

Ledyard took part of the blow upon the guard of his blade. Seamus's blade glanced off and down, through bone, flesh. Ledyard reeled aside. When the horses plunged past blood pulsed from him.

"*Bien touché,*" Rosiere said. "Seamus found him where it hurt."

"But Seamus is spent," Martin said. "He can hardly stay in the saddle."

Seamus had shocked his bad hip as the horses came together. He swayed. He breathed open-mouthed, and the sound was audible above the panting of the horses, the slur of hooves.

He looked down the field to where Ledyard had halted. His blade raised, described the salute. "Once more, Hussar," he said.

His horse moved at the trot, then the canter. He leaned far out from the saddle to deliver his attack.

Ledyard countered, made rapid *riposte.* The blades moved so fast now that they blurred. The whine of steel on steel was constant. The horses' panting was labored, terrible, almost a scream of pain. Ledyard wheeled his mount. He shouted and stood fully upright to give his final stroke.

Martin could see the upward swing of the blade, and the downward. But he could not see Seamus parry.

Seamus was down off his horse. He lay half prone, supported by his arms. When he rose his eyes were full of blood and he groped for his horse.

The horse stood still. Seamus nearly mounted. Then his hands slipped, and he dropped. The horse's quivering belly was above him. He was unmoving, his arms and legs wide.

Men he didn't recognize tried to stop Martin. He broke away from them and reached Seamus. The knowledge, the cold, absolute certainty, was already in his brain as he knelt there. Seamus was dead.

He took Seamus in his arms. Rosiere opened the crowd for him. People spoke but he made no answer. He was hearing a voice inside him, Seamus as he laughed, Seamus as he sang.

THE darkness was soft. It came from the courtyard and gave a lilac-shaded quiet to the room. The swords that hung on the wall, the bottles on the table were lost in it. Where he sat Martin had the thought for an instant that this was Cornwall in the late summer. The dark came up from the river the same way. Then he was aware of Titi Rosiere.

Titi had wept at the cemetery. There in the grass-grown walks of St. Louis while the priest had prayed he had sobbed like a woman. Now he was calm. His voice was as soft as the night.

"We did all we could, Drew. Remember that."

Martin remembered the heavy, neat brick wall of tombs, the shiny wood and silver of the immense wreaths of exotic flowers and the voice of the priest bell-like against the sobbing of the crowd. It was better at home. In Connecticut you buried your own.

"I have you to thank," he said to Titi. "You were his great friend, too."

"He's where he wished," Titi said. "How about you?"

"I'm not sure. I only know one thing. When Ledyard's recovered from his wound I'm going to fight him. I'll wait. I'll learn the sword. But for a certainty he's to meet me."

Titi stirred in his chair. He lit his pipe and in the glow his eyes were somber. "I might argue with you," he said. "Prove to you that you're a fool. I can't. I understand what you mean. Still, I must ask you to let me meet Ledyard first."

"No," Martin said. "That wouldn't solve it. Seamus fought twice because of me, and lost his life. Never could I see you do the same. I'm the man to meet Ledyard."

"Then I have a proposition for you," Titi said. "Stay here in the *salle* and work with me. I'm master of the blade, but not the pistol. More and more of these Creole dandies want to learn the use of the pistol. You could teach them."

"I know little or nothing about it."

"You're an engineer, and an expert with the rifle. I'll teach you what I know and the rest you'll pick up fast."

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"I'd still be unwilling to instruct any man in how to kill another. It's bad enough for Ma Martin's boy to want to be a duelist himself."

"Very well. But will you work here as armorer, test and repair pistols?"

"Yes," Martin said. "I will. In exchange, though, you'll teach me how to duel with the blade?"

"You ask a lot," Titi said. "Not from me, but from yourself. A real duelist isn't made in a couple of months. Years—"

"I haven't got years," Martin said. He imagined in the darkness the field at the oaks and Ledyard waiting for him. He smiled. "I'll take the chance."

CHAPTER VIII

SEND YOUR SECONDS

MARTIN kept no track of the days. They had become very much the same for him. He spent the morning in the little armorer's shop at the back of the *salle*. There he adjusted locks, triggers and sights.

Out in a rear courtyard he built a test range with a man-size wooden figure at one end. Titi's pupils attached a cord to their trousers waistbands that stretched to a pistol held by the figure. When they straightened to fire, the cord tightened, pulled the trigger of the other blank-charged pistol. It taught them to be steady under fire, greatly improved their aim. The bucks of the town used it constantly and Bellay wrote a column about it in *L'Époque*.

During the afternoons Martin took instruction from Titi. He practiced with the foil, the rapier and the saber. Titi, a meticulous and patient master, made him go through the fundamental attacks and parries countless times.

Martin dreamed of the *prime*, the *tierce* and *quarte* at night. He spent his evenings studying Seamus's old books on the duel. Seamus had treasured them and some were extremely valuable. One was an illuminated volume by Jayme Pona de Majorca made at Perpignan in the early sixteenth century. Another was by Camillo Agrippa, published at Rome in 1553.

Those books gave Martin a strange feeling of connection with the past. He awoke occasionally in the night and thought the plumed and booted fencing masters were in the room with him. "I know," he whispered. "The left knee should be over the point of the left foot. And the weight can't be held too long on the right leg or you'll be late getting back into position for the next guard or thrust."

Then as his skill improved and Titi taught him the more subtle parries, he began to dream of Emily Dupret. The men who came to the *salle* mentioned her. She was still engaged to Ledyard, they said, and visited him regularly at the hospital.

He had been in love with Emily ever since that night at the levee, Martin realized. There was no use denying the fact. But if he fought Ledyard she'd be sure to be at the Oaks. She wasn't the kind to stay away from a thing like that. Her presence was another reason for him to win.

One night he and Titi sat late with the old books spread between them. "You're good," Titi said, "as good as any man I've trained. But you must consider this. Ledyard is out of the hospital and has his strength again. He also has news of your practice with me. The sooner you and he fight, the better it is for him. So watch yourself. Don't let him provoke you unless you're ready."

Martin rose and studied the calendar on the table. "My case against Dupret and Ashton comes to trial the day after tomorrow. I can't afford to fight him before. A lot of folks in the North trusted me with their money for the railroad. The way they calculate, fighting duels isn't part of my job. Once the case has been tried, though, it'll be all right. Ledyard kills me, some other engineer can finish the road."

Titi stared at him. "I've often," he said, "tried to think of a term for you. I believe I've finally found it. You're inflexible. Nothing changes your determination."

MARTIN must have dozed over Agrippa's volume on the rapier and stiletto. For when he looked up Emily was standing

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in the doorway from the courtyard. She wore a riding cape and boots and they were marked with dust. "Johnny Pearse told me I'd find you here," she said.

"Where's Johnny?" he said. "And why are you here?"

"He's up at Bayou Latouche guarding your camp," she said. "But he and I have made trips into the swamp together. We located the Choctaws who were with Sam the night the levee broke."

Martin brought her to sit in his chair. He poured her a glass of wine. "Now tell me," he said. "So far, you've been a bit ahead."

"It's very simple," she said. "Very simple, and terrible. Collier—Captain Ledyard—was made delirious by his wound for a few days. He talked in that time of Sam. What he said started me thinking you'd told the truth. Later, he denied it. But the Choctaws told it your way, and I've got depositions from four of them to prove it. They were with Sam when he was paid to break the levee."

"Have you spoken of this to your father?"

"No. I just arrived in town. I decided to let you know first. You have the right."

Martin took her hands and held them tight. "You must be aware," he said, "of what this could do to my case against your father."

"My father had nothing to do with the breaking of the levee," she said. "He suffered from it as you did. Collier Ledyard is to blame, and Dwight Ashton. But if you have a lawful suit in court you should win it."

"I'm deeply grateful to you," he said.

"Johnny Pearse had the idea, not I," she said. "He kept persisting he could find the other Choctaws. Now you've got the truth, though, what are you going to do with it?"

"Let me look at the depositions," he said.

He studied them while she took off her little tricorne hat, shook the dust from her skirt. "I'll give them to M'sieur Bellay, the editor of *L'Époque,*" he said. "He'll print them for me."

She sat back in the chair and gave him a long glance. "I've heard rumors," she said, "that you've been practicing to become a duelist. My intention in bringing the depositions was to keep you from a grave mistake."

"Emily," he said, "I'm in love with you. I have been, I reckon, from the night we talked there on the levee. But my loving you can't stop a fight between me and Collier Ledyard. He's a liar and a murderer, and he killed my best friend. If he and I don't have a meeting out at the oaks, I'd never be able to look at you again."

"He might probably kill you," she said.

"Quite probably," he said. "But that won't stop me, either." He drew her up into his arms and kissed her. "Now I'm going to take you to your folks."

"No," she said. "I'll stay with you until this is finished. Another story I heard was how Sam was killed. I may shock all New Orleans, but I shan't leave you."

A flare of passion passed through Martin's body. He kissed her lips and throat. "You love me?" he said.

"I'm beginning to," she said, "although you frighten me a bit. You're a most obstinate man."

"Talk to your new chaperone, Titi Rosiere, about that," he said. "I can catch Bellay at *L'Époque* now and show him the depositions. The article should be in tomorrow's paper."

"Then I'm going with you," she said.

NEGRO boys sold copies of *L'Époque* up and down in front of the Court House. They shouted aloud Bellay's headline of "Strange Happenings at Bayou Latouche" and it echoed inside the high, hot room.

The judge was quick in his review of the case of Martin versus Dupret and Ashton. There was reason for the show-cause action brought by plaintiff's counsel, he declared, and the title to the disputed land at Bayou Latouche could not be rightfully claimed by the so-named purchaser, Dwight Ashton. Title still belonged to Maxime Dupret and as such the plaintiff's right of way was clear. Defendants were to pay the costs of court.

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Martin waited for a time on the broad steps with Emily and Titi Rosiere. He was possessed by no clear emotion. Life had attained a peak for him last night when Emily had said she loved him. But Emily's father was coming out of court now accompanied by Ledyard and Ashton; and little, bald Bellay stood further on down the steps.

Ledyard's face flushed as he saw Bellay. He held a gold-topped walking stick, lifted it to shoulder height. "What filth are you printing in your sheet, Bellay?" he said. "Those boys are shouting my name."

"You seem to imply, sir," Bellay said, "that your name is synonymous with filth."

Ledyard cursed him and struck with the stick.

Martin caught the end of it from behind. He pulled it away from Ledyard and flung it out across the street. "I'm the man to answer you," he said. "That article was printed at my request. I have the verification for it in my pocket."

Ledyard was slow to speak or move. He glanced up the steps at Ashton, and at Emily. "You force me to defend my honor," he said. "You have offered me gross insult." Then his open hand whipped Martin on the cheek.

"Send your seconds to me," Martin said, "any time you like."

DWIGHT ASHTON was the man chosen to represent Ledyard. He came to the *salle* toward late afternoon. "I wish to speak with you alone," he said to Martin. "You'll allow me the courtesy?"

They stood on the balcony while Ashton earnestly talked. "I'm leaving town tomorrow night," he said. "The scandal resulting from the article in *L'Époque* is enough to wreck any future plans of my syndicate. That idea about the levee was Ledyard's and I knew nothing of it. But my advice to you is not to meet him. He's furious, m' lad, and desperate, and an excellent duelist. Fight him and you'll be split neat."

"You're still hankering to make a bid on my road," Martin said.

"No," Ashton said. "So help me, I'm not. These Creoles stick together tighter than tight can be. Dupret's taken his daughter's side now, naturally, and all of the other Creoles have followed him. But being dead will never help you marry Emily Dupret."

Martin opened the door to the *salle*. "Get out," he said. "Tell Ledyard that as the offended party I have the choice of weapons and take the rapier and the stiletto."

"Both?" Ashton said, staring in amazement.

"Both. It's old-fashioned, but permissible by any code."

Martin and Emily walked in the courtyard after the others were gone that night. "You risk a tremendous lot, Drew," she said. "Even Titi has told me that to duel for the first time with those two weapons against an experienced antagonist means almost certain death.

"It's the reason why I've chosen them," he said. "Ledyard's pretty sure got mastery of one or the other. But not both. No man has dueled with both in over a century. My aim's to worry him as much as hurt him. Titi has trained me with the rapier; he says I stand ready to fight with that, and as my friend and Seamus's he wouldn't tell me wrong."

Her fingers clasped his arm. "I called you a fool once and was wrong," she said. "But this time it means everything."

"We'll win," he said. "Believe me."

"I shall," she said. "I heard father talking with you tonight. I know he asked to be your other second."

CHAPTER IX

THE FATAL OAKS

THE rapiers were of flexible Toledo steel and identical length. The stilettos were double-edged, keen as razors. Just to touch the edge of his own made the breath quicken in Martin's throat.

"Here's what counts," Titi said. "Don't confuse your weapons. Attack with one, or with the other. The stiletto won't save you; you'll have to make your main parries with the rapier. But most important

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of all, your lunges should be given in one single tempo, at unbroken speed. Attack only rarely, and only by surprise. That will win for you if anything will. *Bonne chance.*"

Ledyard was on the field behind his mark. He rested at ease and he smiled. Go ahead and smile back at him, Martin thought, then forgot about it. He balanced the rapier and the stiletto to get their heft, stepped smartly to the mark.

"Ready, gentlemen?"

He set himself in the fencer's crouch and advanced slowly, almost in unison with Ledyard. He let Ledyard lunge first, wanting to see the man's style.

Ledyard kept the stiletto high, in the position of *prime*. He held the rapier in *sixte* but his opening parries were tentative. He's trying to feel you out, too, Martin thought. But wait for him. You're the unknown quantity because you're green.

Martin was crouching even lower now, with his feet well under him; he was precisely balanced. Ledyard had the greater skill, the faster hand; and so Martin would have to depend upon perfectly timed footwork, upon the suddenness and speed of his lunge. Then, too, his wrist was certainly as strong as the other man's.

In a rapid rush Ledyard gave invitation in *seconde*. Martin went in and feinted high to the head. Ledyard's feet creaked on the grass; he gave the stop-thrust with perfect control, the stiletto up and poised.

Titi had taught the answer to that. Martin took the stop-thrust with a counter, sent a *riposte* to the face.

Ledyard backed a bit from the *riposte*. He had stopped smiling and his eyes were savage.

Watch now, Martin thought. Be careful. He's learned you're not a ninny.

Ledyard came at him in a series of rushing lunges. He made his rapier blade a thin, slight arc, and twice the stiletto grazed Martin's shoulder. If he gets any closer with that, Martin realized, you'll be good for the prophecy Ashton made. So now drive him. Put him on the run. You must, or you're a goner for certain.

He advanced then, gave pressure on Ledyard's blade and lunged. But his attack was deftly parried, and he recovered barely in time to escape Ledyard's whipping *riposte*. Never before had he understood how big his body was. It seemed that every part of him was vulnerable, easily exposed to Ledyard's rapier. His skin tightened, and nerves jerked about his eyes.

Ledyard was moving in with a series of lightning disengages, and Martin had to retreat several steps. Then, sensing more than seeing an opening, he brought his blade against Ledyard's with a savage beat and the same instant his foot shot forward in a beautifully timed lunge. His swordpoint caught in the other man's shoulder but only briefly, for Ledyard had leaped back—to launch a counter-attack that was an intricate pattern of steel.

Martin parried frantically, he fell back, almost stumbling; and then he felt the sudden agony of steel in his flesh, deep in the bicep of his rapier arm.

PAIN came in around his brain like flame. He gasped with it and cried out. He saw Ledyard, watched the face change. Ledyard was returning to the attack.

Martin stumbled away from it, pulling his body as if it belonged to some other man. His lungs hurt with his efforts to breathe; a slow, heavy ache went up through his legs into his back. Every time he answered a blow he was a little late.

He no longer knew the parries he used in defense. It seemed that Ledyard's figure had become black and immense, bigger than the oak trees. This man will kill you, he thought. You're weak, you're stupid and you're hopeless.

But then rage came to him. If he was going to die, so was Ledyard. "Attack only rarely," he whispered, "and only by surprise."

He gave a yielding parry and another. Then he braced and lunged. His wounded arm could not hold the rapier steady. The point was carried easily to one side by Ledyard's blade.

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Ledyard poised for a *riposte,* smoothly balanced, forward on his toes.

Martin stumbled. He tried to turn, make the motions of a *demi-volte.* But Ledyard was too close. There was no time. He jerked the stiletto back and with all his strength drove it into Ledyard's chest.

He staggered from side to side with his empty hands held up to the sun. After Ledyard fell he had the impression that the sun filled the sky, burned through his eyes to add to the fury of pain in his brain.

Titi Rosiere came out to him across the grass. "Be careful, Titi," Martin said. "Ledyard's here."

"Ledyard is here," Titi said, "but he's dead."

"How?" Martin said.

"A doctor," Titi said, "might call it from congestion of the lungs. I call it from an effective if clumsy stiletto thrust above the heart."

"I'd like to have a drink," Martin said, "and then to talk to Emily."

He fainted in the carriage on the way to the city. Consciousness partly returned and he knew Emily was next to him, Titi on the other side. But he did not move, attempt to speak to them. He watched the horses' hooves over the roadway, the roll of pebbles from the wheels, a frog in the ditch, all the little things within his vision.

They were different, far more precious than before, because where he had been was in a distant place ringed and walled by death. Images, memories of his youth formed for him. He saw himself jumping in the haymow of the big barn at home with his sisters. He recalled eating too much maple sugar and being sick, so sick he didn't care how hard his father would smack him for it. Some time he'd have to tell Emily about that, all about Cornwall. There'd been a chipmunk he caught and kept under the corn-crib, and the foal he'd used to feed with a spoon.

The memories whirled, were all confused. He reached to take Emily's hand and fainted again.

Emily sat beside his bed when he awoke. It was morning, and out in the *salle* Titi Rosiere and Emily's father talked in low voices.

"I'm taking you to Bayou Latouche tomorrow," Emily said. "Mother won't permit any more of this, and up there while you recuperate you can begin to work on your railroad."

"Can you recollect," he asked her, "any of the names of those rivers I told you that night?"

"I know them all," she said.

"When the job to Memphis is done," he said, "we'll build line across them, on out into the West."

"To the Pacific?" she said.

"To the Pacific," he said.

They were silent. A breeze was entering the city. It came from across the river, and it was sharp, and strong, out of the West.

THE END

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

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She was under his blade, driving her stiletto in and in again, remorselessly

The Angry Amethyst

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Emerald of Isis," "Ruby of France," etc.

There was a flashing, dangerous woman, centuries ago; and she stands beside you now—the mystery at the heart of this jewel

SHIPMAN entered the laboratory briskly, went to his own office, summoned his assistant, laid his hat and coat aside, and sat down at his desk. He took from his pocket a purple pool of light and set it on his desk pad. His assistant entered.

"Ah, Korvo! Want to show you something," he said. He did not like Korvo, who was a dark, sinister, off-the-trail European by birth; but Shipman was not in business for his likes or dislikes. Korvo knew jewels and was a wizard at working with them.

"Look at this amethyst I just bought," he went on. "Enormous as it is, it has

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almost no gem value; we can afford to experiment with it any way we like. That huge flaw ruins it, and it's not worth recutting, of course. Yet it's very interesting."

Korvo seized avidly on the gem. He was a genius in the business of Shipman's laboratory, which served jewelers everywhere with the latest methods of testing, cutting and mounting gems, of handling them in every conceivable way; and of educating the jewel trade and those engaged in it.

"Exceedingly so!" exclaimed Korvo. "Even the flaw is interesting. It has a history?"

Shipman shrugged. His lean hawk-face was lined, his eyes were tired.

"Not that I could learn. That gem cutter on Sixth Street brought it from France last year with some other cheap specimens. This is a remarkable stone, because of the helical arrangement of its molecular structure. The glass shows triangular sectors, and beautiful feathery inclusions—"

The telephone broke in. He reached for the instrument; the outer office was calling.

"That young lady is here, Mr. Shipman—Miss Crews? You remember, the one who—"

"Good lord!" exclaimed Shipman. "Send her in—no, wait. Send her in as soon as Korvo leaves."

He hung up and looked at his assistant, excitement in his gaze.

"That young woman: you remember, with the ruby? She's here."

"Good!" Korvo's smile was saturnine. He pointed to the buttons at the edge of Shipman's desk. "Let her in, call the police, and you have a thief."

"No, no." Shipman gestured irritably. "I don't believe it; I can't believe it of her! Look: You go into the examination room, get into the little closet behind the curtain, and wait there, hidden. See what happens. See whether we're dealing with hypnotic illusion, trickery, or—"

"I believe we're dealing with a clever jewel thief," said Korvo, shrugging.

"I refuse to believe it."

Korvo departed.

SHIPMAN controlled himself with difficulty; he, so lean and prosaic and hard-boiled, who had dealt in gems and jewels all over the world, was now as eager as a boy. Twice had this dark and lovely girl come to the laboratory to have a gem examined in the polyandroscope, that complicated scientific eye which so amazingly revealed the inmost secrets of any jewel.

Twice, strange things had happened; things so strange that Shipman could not credit his own senses. This young woman exerted a singular fascination over him. He felt in her an appeal, a great liking, even intimacy, as if they were ancient friends. Yet he knew nothing whatever about her, except that she was, presumably, a jewel thief; this was not yet certain. The name she had given him, however, was false.

"Miss Crews!" He used that name, perforce, as she entered the office and came toward his desk. He reached across it for her hand; she was smiling, composed, a beautifully slender creature with radiant eyes and an obvious gladness at sight of him.

"I've come again," she said, laughing. "But if you're going to examine jewels for me, then you must let me pay you for your time."

"Don't be absurd," he struck in brusquely. "It's a great pleasure; more, you've opened to me a new and amazing world. I don't know whether it's hallucination or not, but I find it fascinating. You want to look at a stone in the machine?"

"Yes. I have a sapphire here— *Oh!*" Awe and delight leaped in her voice. She leaned forward, and from the desk seized the amethyst Korvo had laid down. Shipman smiled to see the wonder grow in her face as she inspected it.

"In spite of its large size, it's not a good stone," he said.

"But you don't understand!" she exclaimed, her wide eyes flitting to him.

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"Only certain stones make this appeal to me; value has nothing to do with it. This is wonderful; it's an old friend; I must see it in the machine, I must!" Her breath was coming fast, and excitement colored her cheeks.

The phone rang, and Shipman excused himself to answer. He heard Korvo's voice.

"Chief, she got a drink of water while waiting. Mind if I have the glass sent to the sheriff's technician? We'd get a report back on the fingerprints, you know, by phone."

Shipman hesitated, then decided. "Go ahead. I'm using the examination room in a minute."

He hung up and looked at the girl. "Shall we repeat our experiment?" he asked. "I know nothing about that bit of quartz except that it came from France with other stones. Its internal structure, however, is very curious." He rose. "Well, shall we go?"

With obvious reluctance, she yielded the amethyst to him, and they went to the outer office, thence on to the examination room.

This was a tiny place, sound-proofed, windowless, holding only three chairs and the huge polyandroscope, with its great glass sphere and curved silver reflector overhead. The door closed, Shipman advanced to the machine. Miriam Crews—the only name by which he knew her, yet a name he knew to be false—dropped into one of the chairs.

"I am sorry," she said abruptly, "not to be able to tell you the whole truth."

"Eh?" He turned and looked at her. "About what?"

She gestured lightly. "Myself. Everything. I even gave you a false name."

"That is your privilege," he said, and gave his attention now to the machine before him. Yet, stealing a glance, he fancied that his words had brought a flush to her cheek.

He set the amethyst in the central clamp, tightening the latter carefully. At a touch of his finger the room darkened; the faint vibration of the machine became audible, as he took one of the chairs. At its heart, the thin needle of light was visible, growing more piercing and distinct with each instant.

As if the darkness removed her inhibitions, she went on speaking.

"Yes; I feel you might be able to help me. How? Why? I don't know. There are times when everything gets dim; when I do things and don't know why or what. Well, let it go. Perhaps, some other time, I'll speak more plainly."

He wanted with all his heart to urge her now; but he could not. He knew of Korvo, hidden and listening, and this sealed his lips. When she spoke about the amethyst, he replied quickly and gladly.

"Why did I call this stone curious? Because the inclusions, or flaws as they're usually termed, are singular in the extreme. Since you're very sensitive to certain gems, this may account for the peculiar effect of the stone on you. This is a very deep, rich violet, with a preponderance of red—but look for yourself."

The lighted needle was pulsating; the polarized light rays were at work, a delicate suffusion of radiance filled the curved silver reflector, and slowly grew within the great glass ball before their eyes. It was not the hue of the stone, but a rich clear crimson and a fainter blue.

"The hues of the amethyst," murmured Shipman. "This gem always has twin individuals—ah! Now you can see the stone itself."

Here was the deep violet growing within the sphere; more, it was the tremendously enlarged crystal itself, vibrating with a glow of purple light that spread and spread until the little room was ablaze with the rich radiance. The girl beside Shipman was fast-breathing, intent, utterly absorbed. . . .

"She has sore need of you," said a voice, a man's voice.

Shipman glanced around, startled. Had Korvo spoken, in his hiding-place? No; it was not his voice. Now it came again:

"She says you're the one honest man she knows, and begs your help."

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"Poor lass!" said another voice. "I'll come at once. Thank God it's too dark for any to see! It would ill accord with my position were it known I visited that house on the south side of Pall Mall. But who would injure her?"

"It is a plot," said the first voice, "of Louise, the Duchess of Portsmouth. Now that the King is dead—"

"They couldn't wait six hours, eh? Very well, very well. Tell her to expect me at the side door, in an hour."

. . . Shipman was incredulous. He glanced at the girl; she was listening, her lips half parted. She heard those voices, too.

The glorious radiance had increased. Now, within the big glass globe, appeared the enormously enlarged flaws of the amethyst. The feathery inclusions shimmered and vibrated; streaks of other hues shot athwart the purple. A streak of yellow—the opening of a door upon the night, lighting a snowy street.

A MAN was entering that doorway. A scene grew and grew before Shipman's eyes. A stout, ugly man, doffing hat and great-coat and muffler; he was bowing over the hand of a second figure, a shadowy figure. This became a woman, young and lovely; she was speaking to him.

"It was good for you to come, Master Pepys. Make yourself warm by the fire, here."

"Brr! It feels good," said Samuel Pepys. "A more bitter winter we've not had in years. Good of me? Tush, tush! Mistress Nell, this is a sad day for us all."

She assented. In the dancing firelight, her face stood out saucy, pert, yet touched by grief with a soft beauty. She eyed the ugly, stubborn man before her, and nodded again.

"I ask your pardon," she said gently. "I've played jokes on you; I've called you a tattle-headed, prattle-tongued old babbler, and worse. I've played the fool, and the devil—"

"But you loved him, madame," broke in Pepys. "You're the only one who did love him. And loyalty is the greatest and rarest of all virtues."

"That's precisely what I find in you," said she. "As Admiralty Secretary, Mr. Pepys, you're the most loyal man at court. Well, well—I suppose you know they wouldn't let me see him?"

Pepys assented. "He died at noon, madame, very quietly . . ."

"Don't madame me!" she broke out. "You know you wouldn't do it to my back, so don't do it to my face."

Pepys sighed, and laughed. "Ah, Nelly, always the same! Well, Charles is dead today and James is king tonight; but jealousy died with him. Why should any hate you?"

"For profit," said she. "I'm thought to have a great store of wealth here."

Pepys gave her a shrewd look. "Well, haven't you?"

"The house is mine, but I've only a few pounds to my name," she replied simply. "And my jewels. It's my jewels they're after; and what to do? Who is false, who is true? The city is full of rioting. The 'prentices are out. This afternoon I sent to one and another alleged friend, and had no answer; those who could leave London, have left. Those who could swing over to the new king, have swung. And my house is to be looted this night."

"Oh!" said Pepys uneasily. He had great courage, but of a purely moral sort. "Your servants?"

"Have fled, with what they could steal," she said with contempt. "I'm safe enough; I'm going downriver to Greenwich, but dare take nothing with me. You know what the watermen are. Will you take my jewels to York Buildings with you, and keep 'em safe for me?"

Pepys hesitated. He was fifty-one, and stout of body if not of heart.

"Aye," said he. "And yet I'll not be responsible, Nelly. God knows what may happen ere the night's out. I'm alone, not so much as a servant with me. I'll go find link boys, and a couple of good stout men, then return and get your precious gauds."

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"You'll take them now; I must be off quickly," she intervened, with an energy that left him appalled. "Responsibility? Not a whit. They'd be lost if I left 'em; do your best by 'em, and I'll ask no more. Nothing's safe this night, as you truly say."

"But, Nelly! If I lost them, if they were stolen—"

She laughed, a little bitterly. "Poor I was when Charles found me, and I've never been so poor as when he left me this day; after that loss, who has power to make me poor? Here, honest Pepys. I've made 'em into packets. Stuff your pockets, thus!"

She lifted a cloth from the couch, to reveal six plump little packages of sewn cloth. He attempted to protest; his methodical soul demanded seals, an inventory, Heaven knows what. She silenced him with scathing, bawdy tongue. She, poor sad creature, loser so suddenly of place and power and love, had no heart to pick pretty words this night.

"Wait, here's one more," she said, helping him stuff coat and greatcoat pockets. She twisted a ring from her finger and thrust it at him. "Charles gave it me, I give it you, for your help; a pretty stone, but of no great value. And I've enough to carry . . ."

She put the ring on his finger and wound on his muffler and pushed him forth, into the bitter February night. King Charles had died this noon of February sixth, 1685.

"I'VE enough to carry . . ." Those impulsive words revealed a lot of Samuel Pepys, who was one of the shrewdest men in London. Nelly Gwyn was no liar. He had her jewels here; she was never one to think heavily upon money. She was, no doubt, taking to cover with her children by King Charles. This would be a wild night, and the mistresses of the dead king would be the first to suffer from the mob. But Nell feared the mob less than those other royal favorites, who hated her so bitterly.

Turning into Pall Mall, cursing the bitter cold wind, Pepys was alarmed to glimpse a shadowy figure behind him. He quickened pace; so did the other. He crossed the street; so did that figure. Angry mob-murmurs were swelling upon the night from the City ahead.

Pepys quickened pace, thinking to reach Whitehall and find shelter or help in the palace. More desperate grew his alarm and fear when a whistle from behind was answered from ahead. He saw two dim shapes appear there, waiting for him.

He knew he was caught.

"Come, come, worthy sir!" The shadow from behind was at his elbow now. "A word with you, pray! Or must I give the order with an inch of steel in your fat haunch?"

Pepys halted. Tell his rank and position? It would do him no good with footpads.

"Well? What do you want?" he demanded, with a quaver, as the other two men came up.

The first man laughed. "Jewels and gold, my honest rascal! What brought you away from that house, eh?"

Still Pepys had no idea that this was anything more than an ordinary holdup. He resolved to play poor City merchant; and, as a sword-point pricked him, clasped his hands with a howl of unfeigned anguish.

"Good sirs, spare me! I have but three shillings, and was at that house to collect a debt, for which I took a ring. Take it, if you will. Take my money, and let me get home to my family."

"Damn your family, and you too! Ring, say you?"

"Here, here," exclaimed Pepys, taking the ring from his cold hand.

The other snatched it, flung an order at his two men, and each of them gripped one of Pepys' arms. The leader frisked the prisoner hastily, felt the packets, and stepped back.

"Ha! Stuffed like a Christmas boar from apple to carrot. This is our man, lads. Haul him along. March, sirrah! And if you let out a cry, I'll split your liver."

Pepys held his liver in high regard. Further, shouting would have done him no good; a fury of voices was rising in dif-

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ferent quarters, and honest citizens were barred in for the night. One of the two men spoke in French, as they marched the captive along.

"Will she be waiting for us, Sieur Denis?"

"And the devil with her," replied the leader.

French, eh? Pepys, who spoke the tongue and had married a French wife, took fresh alarm. A plot of Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth; the late king's French mistress! It surely behooved him to keep a still tongue in his head. Poor Nelly had lost her jewels; but he had no desire to lose his own life.

Yet, since he was the most curious man alive, those words pricked his interest. She, and the devil with her? Portsmouth, perhaps, yet hardly likely. She? Scenting intrigue and gossip and scandal, Pepys trotted along and took fresh heart. If they had meant to murder him, they would have done it in the first place. Pluck up heart, then! So long as they thought him a person of no importance, they would not bother to kill him.

Wishing mightily for his own warm fireside, he was turned into a narrow lane and in at a shabby house, one of those flimsy structures run up after the great fire of nineteen years back, and now degenerated into rentals of any sort, for any purpose.

They all tramped in, knocked the snow from their boots, and voices filled the house with cheerful oaths. No need of secrecy here, eh? Sieur Denis ordered wine brought; then he shoved Pepys into a large room where a single person sat. A large room, well enough lit, but chilly despite the blazing fireplace.

"Here's our man, Lucie!" cried Sieur Denis. "You were right; ah, what a brain you have! I thought it folly to warn her of any alleged plot, but you were right. She sent out for a man, some tradesman, and here he is, and he's bulging with her jewels!"

She, and the devil with her! The words recurred to Pepys now, as she stirred in her chair and stood up. A slim woman, young, wearing man's attire with sword and dagger, hair clipped close—a dark, lovely woman, scarcely more than a girl.

Yet, as she peered at him, Pepys knew there was a devil in her. That dark, dusky loveliness held infernal fires; from court favorite to courtesan, Samuel Pepys knew women passing well. His fear now was lest she know him.

"Who is this fat pig?" she demanded in French.

"A tradesman, I tell you," said Sieur Denis. He proved to be a rakehelly, swaggering blade, much down at heel; but had a wary cock to his sharp eye. "Look how his pockets are stuffed, Lucie. I touched nothing, but it's plain he's our man."

"If not, so much the worse for you," said she. Her dagger slipped out and she slid it at Pepys, who started back. "Unload yourself, pig!" she ordered in English.

Helpless, Pepys sadly obeyed, pulling forth the packets that stuffed his pockets.

She seized upon the first and slit it with her dagger. Out of the cloth tumbled jewels in their boxes. She forced open the little boxes, and a cry of delight, a fiercely eager cry, escaped her.

"We have them, Denis! Take them all. Into the corner with this pig!"

So the packets were unladen to the tabletop, and Pepys, glad of his life and the warmth, was herded back into the dark corner by the settle at one side the fire, where he was content to remain, forgotten. No hero, he.

Over the table tumbled jewels, as the little wench slit open the packets and tore at the little boxes. A fury was upon her, a wild and terrible frenzy, she pawed over them all with her slim strong fingers, as if searching something that was not here.

THEY were not wonderful gems. Many were mere trifles or mementos, for Mistress Nell got, and was content with, the leavings of the three Sultanas, as the late king's other ladies were termed. Yet they were fine and glittering and made a fair show. Lucie raked aside two or three and left the rest as they were.

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"It's not here!" she cried with a furious storm of oaths.

"What?" queried the bravo.

"The amethyst Charles gave her. The great stone set in a ring—the amethyst he had from King Louis. The amethyst that was taken from the pommel of Charlemagne's sword." She fairly shrieked the words in torrential passion.

Unluckily for himself, Sieur Denis, who must have forgotten the ring taken from Pepys, clapped hand to pocket. Instantly Lucie whirled upon him, catching the gesture, knowing what it signified. She flew at him like a flame blown by the wind.

"Thief! Accursed thief!" she cried, and her dagger slashed. It merely wounded him slightly. But Denis, already uneasy before her unleashed frenzy, was stung into rage and fear. He roared out a curse, bared his sword, and slapped her across the face with the flat of the blade.

"Careful, witch!" he blared in hot anger. "If you—"

Whatever his intent, that blow ended his life. A scream ecaped her—a scream like the wordless, senseless voice of a whirlwind gust. His blade was useless against her; she was in under it, thrusting it aside with her bare hand, driving the stiletto in and in and in with remorseless reiteration. Her second lunge had already split his heart; yet she kept on striking until he collapsed and rolled under the table.

Then she was upon him, searching his pockets, finding the ring and coming erect into the light, holding it up to see, gloating upon it.

Pepys, quite forgotten, stared in a paralysis of horror. The sight of her lovely face as she stood there devouring the gem with her eyes, made his flesh creep. Her voice reached him with the rich low singing cadence of a wind-harp, and set his hair on end.

"Beautiful, glorious stone! Destined to be bathed in blood from age to age, heart of my heart, life of my life! When I perish, my spirit shall flow into you and live within you for ever . . ."

Sharp interruption came with a knocking at the door.

Swift as light, the girl slipped the ring on her finger, stooped, wiped her dagger on the limp thing lying there. She caught a cloak from a chair and threw it over the body of Denis, and came erect.

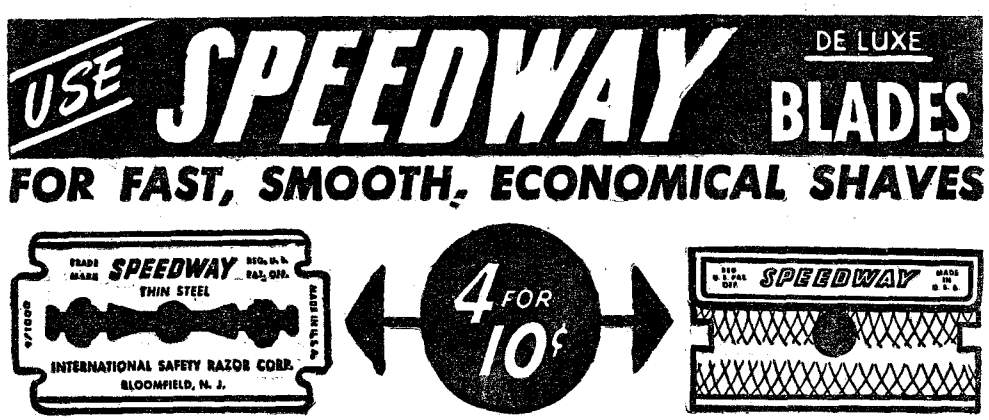
"Well?" leaped her voice. "Well? What is it? How dare you disturb us?"

"It is the milord, mademoiselle!" came response. "He is here to see you."

"Bring him, then. Bring wine also," she answered. "Then go to the post-tavern and have my coach made ready; I want it here in half an hour."

She swung around, flashing a look about the room. Her glance fell upon Pepys, and for one instant he shrank under her eye; she broke into a laugh, gestured to him, and spoke in her very good English.

"You cannot go, little man, until I



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leave; but you shall not be harmed. Quick! Put your head in your arms and pretend to be drunk. Quick, I say!"

Pepys adjusted his wig and slumped down on the settle, just as the door opened. He had the quick wit so to adjust himself that he could peep out upon the room, however. Finding that she meant him no harm afforded him vast relief.

A servant brought in wine and cups. So perfectly was Sieur Denis concealed by the cloak, and by the broad table above, that none would notice him. Certainly not the man who now came swaggering into the room, having left his warm mufflings outside.

SIR JAMES ALLEYNE—Pepys recognized him instantly—stopped short at sight of the glittering baubles on the table. Lucie came to him; turning to her, he bowed over her hand with a show of courtly grace.

"La! I thought I beheld jewels, mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "until I looked into your eyes and saw how deluded I had been!"

"Never mind silly talk," she said, laughing. "Here's wine; a toast to success. You must be half frozen, too."

"Lucia, you'd warm a brazen statue to life!" Sir James took the flagon and darted a glance at the settle. "Hello! Who's yonder?"

"Oh!" She laughed again, merrily. "That's the messenger who carried her pretty baubles. He's dead drunk; never mind him."

They clinked flagons and drank.

Pepys was thankful to be thus passed over; Alleyne knew him, and he knew Alleyne. A man wholly blackguard, an adventurer knighted by favor of Portsmouth, Sir James served this French adventuress who had won an English title. Still young, he was noted for his treachery, vice and profligacy; he had a bitter bony face, with a slit gash of a mouth and a cruel wide-angled jaw. Here, thought Pepys, was fitting steel for this she-devil's flint.

"You're a clever wench," said Alleyne admiringly, as he eyed the table. "So Nelly swallowed the bait, eh?"

"Quite. And the pretty little French girl sent you to make certain none was lost or stolen," gibed Lucie.

He turned to her, put out his hand, and drew her to him so that he could look into her face. He kissed her quickly; she did not resist, but she did not return his kiss.

"What a pretty boy you make, my dear! Upon my word, are you jealous because I'm in service to Her Grace of Portsmouth?"

"Jealous? Of you? Satan forbid!" she replied, with contempt that must have stung him deeply, for he reddened. "And of her? Why, she's long in the flank as a sway-backed mare, and a neck like a wan swan. Did not your Mistress Gwyn say as much?"

He nodded. "Aye. Nelly's very words; and that's why Nell goes poor this night, and shall go poorer ere she dies, for hatred follows her."

"Well, you'd better shift to another mistress, my fine milord," she rejoined, with more bite than jest in her tone. "Portsmouth and the other ladies of the royal harem will be chased out of England."

He broke into laugh, kissed her again, then released her.

"True, true! But my future's secure, sweet one, so be comforted. Devil take you, why is there no warmth in your kisses?"

"Because it's only evoked by the right man."

Anger sharpened his features. Without further banter, he turned to the table and began poking among the jeweled trinkets with his fingers.

"Aye, Nelly's jewels, sure enough. This is the collar Sir John Germain gave her—and she sent him packing despite the gift. And here's the necklace she had from the king—the late king, I should say—when her first son was born. Hm! Pretty things, but nothing very wonderful. Where is the ring Her Grace is so devilish set upon having?"

Lucie's brows lifted, though her lovely eyes hardened.

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"How should I know what ring she wants? They're all there; take 'em all to her."

Alleyne shook his head. "You know very well, sweet Lucie. You agreed with Her Grace that if you succeeded in getting these jewels, you should have any one piece you desired, as reward. Any piece except the one Her Grace must have if it kills her."

"Oh!" said Lucie. "She did say something of the sort. What was it she wanted?"

"An amethyst the King gave Nelly. Come, wench!" Alleyne turned upon her, frowning. "You know very well; why this pretense? An amethyst taken from the tomb of Charlemagne. Her Grace described it; a ring. The stone is supposed to have some sort of magic power. All bosh, of course, but Her Grace desires and will have it."

"How soon you lose your veneer of polite courtesy, when you deal with women!" observed Lucie with dangerous gentleness. "You kiss their hands, then their lips; and having won 'em, you think they're merely your slaves ever after."

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Sir James. "Where's that amethyst ring, wench?"

"On my finger, scoundrel," said she, looking him in the eye. Her delicate nostrils were flaring with anger, but he ignored the danger signals. "Any one piece: that reward was promised. I took it. Now gather up the leavings and run with them to your mistress. I've more respect for the woman they were stolen from, than for your titled bawd who'd steal them."

Sir James picked up his wine-cup and finished his wine, and set it down again.

"So you're asking for trouble, little Lucie?" he said, smiling unpleasantly. She twisted the ring from her finger, and slipped it into her bosom; but he broke into a laugh, and shrugged. "Well, my dear, do as you please. Her Grace won't like it; however, that's your affair and not mine. One last kiss, then help me pack up this stuff and I'll be off."

As he spoke, he came to her carelessly, negligently, and took her hand, stooping his lips to hers. His arm swept around her . . .

THEN he had her, as in a vise; his one arm gripped her two wrists and held her tightly against him. With the other hand, he tore at her shirt of fine linen, ripping it away, a roar of laughter coming from him as she struggled and cursed and tried in vain to bite.

He had the ring at last, and now he flung her from him so violently that she tripped and fell full length with a clang.

"Damme!" Sir James held the amethyst to the light. "A monstrous pretty stone and of size, but they say of poor value. Well, Her Grace said not to return without it; no accounting for tastes. And you," he added, pouching the ring and giving the prostrate Lucie a glance, "seem equally insistent upon having it. Well, up with you, wench! Up, and pick what you will from the lot, before I take my leave."

Lucie lay as she had fallen, on one elbow, looking up at him.

"If you want to take your leave at all, James," she said, in a low voice that told of restraint and peril, "then put that ring back on the table."

He smiled gayly, brought out a snuff-box, and partook delicately.

"Ah, Lucie, when in temper you're a lovely slut!" he said. "What, hand to hilt? Nonsense; you'd not draw sword upon me, as you lie there?" He fell to laughing.

"It's your last chance," she replied. "Put the ring on the table."

"Nonsense; the ring's for your betters," he said. "Come, wench—"

She came, and with a vengeance. She was up and on her feet in one lithe spring, the sword clear of its scabbard.

She almost caught him unawares; but not quite. As she came at him, he swept one of the brass candlesticks from the table and hit her across the forehead. The blow sent her reeling and staggering, blood springing from the cut.

She recovered and leaped in, her face a mask of lithe fury and trickling blood.

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One desperate oath, and Alleyne had his sword out to meet her attack. He knew now what a devil was in her, for she beat him back and back, cutting and thrusting like a mad thing. In vain he cried out at her, cursed her, implored her to show sense. She meant his death, and he saw it, and rallied furiously.

For one flashing instant he seemed her master; but the instant passed. Hoarse breaths rang upon the room; hatred and passion and terror filled the air. White-faced, eyes staring, he fell back again. Her point slid across his blade and a cry was wrenched from him. He stumbled, and she drove her sword through and through him. His arms flew out wide and he dropped his blade.

She stabbed him again as he stood wavering.

He crumpled up. She flung herself upon him, tore the amethyst ring from his pocket, and slipped it again on her hand. A wild, panting laugh came whistling from her lips. She wrenched a strip from her torn shirt and twisted it about her hurt forehead, caught up cloak and coat and donned them, followed with a cavalier's plumed hat that fell over her face.

The jewels from the table, she stuffed helter-skelter into her pockets. She was still panting, still ablaze with her furious energy, as she went to the candles. One by one she pressed them out, retrieved her sword and slid it into scabbard, and went to the door with swift pace.

The door swung open. Her voice was heard, shrilling at her servants; then the door slammed and everything was lost.

Upon the silence of the room, the fitful firelight cast glimmering play of radiance and shadow. Pepys, utterly forgotten, stirred and came to his feet. The air was sickish with the smoking reek of candles and the raw scent of blood.

Greatcoat and muffler and hat were by the settle. He reached for them, got into them, and tip-toed across the floor.

The door closed behind him. Upon the room fell only the play of firelight, dying into scarlet glints, long purplish shadows stretching from table and corpse. Everything faded into a glow of reddish violet, a lovely amethystine light. . . . It was the light of the stone in the polyandroscope, hugely enlarged, speckled with feathery flaws and inclusions.

SHIPMAN put out his hand and shut off the machine. The delicate, restful light slowly died away. He could find no words; he knew that the slim dark Lucie had the very features of this girl beside him, except that the one was a devil, the other an angel.

He touched the light-switch, and a glare lighted the room. From the girl broke a sharp cry of protest.

"No, no! The light's too strong; wait a moment."

Obediently, he plunged the little room into darkness again.

"That was—it was terrible!" came her breathless voice. "I mean, that woman. Why, she looked like me! I'm sorry; I must go. I don't feel well at all."

Shipman caught a swift rustle of movement. She brushed past him. As he struggled to find words, the door opened and closed again. He realized that she must have rushed out of the room. He threw on the light; yes, she was gone.

"Korvo! Are you there?"

The curtain of the recess fluttered aside. His assistant stepped out into sight, his darkly intent features set in lines of wonder and surmise. For an instant the two men looked at each other, until Shipman broke the silence.

"Well, speak up! Did you see and hear what I did?"

Korvo nodded. "The amethyst from Charlemagne's tomb, eh? Yes. I can even smell the blood and the candle grease. It was no hallucination, chief. And she was right about that woman Lucie resembling her, in a way. Hello! Where's our visitor gone?"

A knock came at the door. Shipman flung it open. His secretary stood there.

"Telephone, Mr. Shipman. It's the sheriff's office."

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"Oh, all right." Shipman turned to Korvo. "Get on the extension; I'm afraid we'll learn the truth now. Where did the young lady go?" he asked the secretary.

"She left in a hurry. Went out."

Shipman hastened to his office phone, and made answer. The sheriff's technician, whom he knew well, greeted him with raucous mirth.

"So you're trying to put something over on me, huh? All right, brother Shipman! If you don't think we're good, then listen to this. The prints on that glass are positively identified as those of Julie Favre, otherwise known as the Jewel Maniac. A young woman of purely criminal type who was a devil on the subject of jewels. Stole the pretty things right and left. She killed three women and a man because of jewels: plain murder."

"Oh!" Shipman felt his heart sink. That name was vaguely familiar. "What do you mean by saying that I was trying to put something over?"

"Fingerprints don't lie, huh?" The other chuckled. "Oh, sure! I know you have all the jewel cases on earth filed in your office! Thought you'd reconstruct the prints and have some fun with us, eh?"

"I don't get it," said Shipman. "Just what are you driving at?"

"Oh, nothing much, except that this gal was guillotined at Lyons, in 1920. So long."

Shipman hung up, staring blankly. Korvo came into the office and halted.

"You heard?" Shipman asked. "What do you make of it?"

Korvo hesitated. "Chief, I can make a good deal of it, but nothing you or anyone else would believe. That thing we saw, or rather something the girl Lucie said, gave me an idea. Remember, I used to be a professor of metaphysics at Gottingen, before I came to this country—"

"Don't be silly," broke in Shipman impatiently. "This girl, by her fingerprints, is a woman who was guillotined for murder twenty years ago. Yet this girl isn't much over twenty herself; and she's no ghost! There are the facts."

"Or you think they're facts," Korvo observed thoughtfully. "Give me time. I got a real idea out of what we saw."

"Or what we imagined." Shipman rose. "I'd better take that amethyst out of the machine; I forget it. I suppose you'll say that it's the same amethyst, the one from the tomb of Charlemange."

"Well, I certainly think it is." Korvo was accompanying him. "And I can give a very logical explanation, too; not yet, of course. You'll hear from that young lady again. Don't be impatient."

"Stuff and nonsense!" snapped Shipman.

He was blankly incredulous. Despite everything, the appeal in that girl's eyes had gone to his heart; her loveliness cried out to him. He remembered her strange words, her apologies, her sorrow . . .

"Well," said Korvo, a moment later, "now we know why she skipped out in such a hurry. Light hurt her eyes, eh? A good stall; you turned the lights off again, and she got it and skipped."

For the amethyst was gone.

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The Shame of Arizona

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Buckshot for Henry," "Thirty Days for Henry," etc.

Alas for Wild Horse Valley and its amiable sheriff, Henry Harrison Conroy. The era of good feeling is officially over; and it is open season again for dry-gulchers, bank robbers, horse-thieves, smugglers—and critics of the local administration

CHAPTER I

LUKE-WARM HOTBED

IT WAS along a far-flung stretch of the Mexican Border, south of Tonto City, where most of the terrain is on edge. Moonlight silvered the brushy, rocky hills, smoothing the rough edges. Here was the old bar-wire fence, which separated Arizona from the land of *mañana,* with its beaten trail where the Border Patrol, rode, always alert for the *contrabandista.*

Two dim figures worked beside the fence, loosening staples from the weathered posts. One could hear an occasional *cre-e-eak,* as a staple was withdrawn. The two men worked slowly and carefully, alert for any sound, until they had dropped the wires from a number of posts. Then they went back, only to ride out of the brush a few minutes later and carefully work their horses over the down wires.

But one horse caught a loose wire across an ankle, picked up the slack, whirled and caught the wire across the heel of its shoe. The taut wire whined and hummed, as the horse reared backwards, trying to get loose, and the rider leaped out of the saddle, cursing aloud. Then the wire snapped, but the rider clung to the tie-rope and managed to subdue the animal.

Two of the Border Patrol, riding along the fence, had heard the wires, and were coming at a swift gallop as the unseated rider mounted his nervous horse. Guns flamed in the moonlight when the two men who had crossed the Border opened fire. It was like the popping of a dozen firecrackers; then a complete silence.

The two men who had crossed the border moved in close to each other.

"Downed both of 'em, damn 'em," one growled. "You git hit?"

"Naw. Well, we won't have them two to bother about. Let's go."

SEVERAL hours later Ted Vickers and Jack Bennett, Border Patrolmen, rode into Tonto City on one horse. Vickers was unconscious, riding in the saddle, while behind him rode Bennett, badly hurt but able to keep Vickers upright. They found Dr. Knowles. Bennett was able to tell him that they had been ambushed near the Border, and that the dry-gulchers had gone north.

Danny Regan, the young foreman of the JHC spread, was having a poker session at the King's Castle Saloon, but offered to awaken the sheriff and deputy. Danny pounded loudly on a door in the Tonto Hotel; then invited himself in and lighted the lamp.

Henry Harrison Conroy, the sheriff of Tonto, short and fat, with the reddest nose to ever grace a vaudeville poster, sat up in bed and blinked thoughtfully at Danny. Rising to a corresponding position beside him was Judge Van Treece, the deputy: sixty years of age; tall, lean and gaunt, his scraggly gray hair standing on edge as he gazed at Danny through pouched eyes.

They were like a pair of suddenly awakened owls—one a fat, round-faced

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Wham! Oscar pulled the trigger, and the small office shook with the concussion

owl, the other of the horned variety; very fierce, but slightly bewildered.

Danny proceeded to tell them about Vickers and Bennett. Henry doubled a fat fist and massaged his nose violently.

"Rub the thing off," advised Judge, "it's a nuisance."

"Eh? Oh!" Henry chuckled. "How badly are they injured, Danny?"

"Vickers got hit twice and Bennett got it once. Doc says they'll prob'ly live. Bennett says the smugglers came this way; he's dead shore of that, Henry."

"Hm-m-m-m," mused Henry. "Came this way. My goodness!"

"Well, suppose they did?" said Judge. "Tonto City has always been a hotbed of *contrabandistas*. Two more would not harm us. As far as that is concerned, it might be two of our very best citizens. You were about to speak, sir?"

"If given an opportunity," replied Henry dryly. "I rather resent that hotbed assertion, Judge. Unfortunately we are close to the Border, and also unfortunately there is money to be made in an illegal practice, such as smuggling drugs and jewels—not to mention the heathen Chinee. But this is not a hotbed, Judge."

"It is more than just luke-warm, Henry."

"Oh, possibly a degree or two—but not hot."

"We've got to move some horses pretty quick," said Danny. "Today I heard that there's a buyer in Agua Frio, offerin' a hundred dollars for horses. Looks like another move toward a revolution. Our horse herd is workin' too darned close to the Border."

"Might be well to put them on the north range," nodded Henry.

"Hmph!" snorted Judge. "Wake a man up in the middle of the night to report a shooting scrape, over which nothing will be done. This is a Federal case, anyway.

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Never mind the horses. Go home, Danny, and let us sleep."

"I could," suggested Danny, "get Zell Hork and Nick Balleau to help me throw them horses onto the north range."

Nick Balleau and Zell Hork worked for Steve Malloy's Quarter Circle M, lying close to the Border, and due south of Tonto City.

"Very well," agreed Henry. "I quite approve of that, Danny."

"If this business session is over, perhaps we might go back to sleep," said Judge.

"All right, Judge," grinned Danny. "See yuh *mañana.*"

AS DANNY started for the door they heard the unmistakable sound of two shots, spaced about a second apart. It was not unusual to hear shots fired in Tonto City, because cowboys are prone to salute the moon with a six-shooter during slight inebriation; but following so closely on the shooting at the Border, the shots seemed to signify trouble.

Judge groaned audibly. "And after all the nice things the Scorpion Bend *Clarion* said about the lack of crime in Wild Horse Valley," he said.

"I did not see the paper today," remarked Henry. "In fact, I never expected the editor to say anything nice about us."

"Rather premature, I am afraid," sighed Judge. "I have a feeling that something is wrong."

"Do yuh think I ought to go and see if anythin' is wrong?" asked Danny.

Heavy footsteps clattered down the hallway. Henry said, "No use, Danny—something *is* wrong."

It was Tommy Roper, the young man who operated the livery stable: an ex-cowboy with a noteworthy impediment in his speech. Danny opened the door. Tommy was hatless and coatless, breathing heavily.

"Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh—" began Tommy.

"Sheriff," prompted Henry. "No prefaces, Tommy; what actually happened?"

"Man," replied Tommy, "sh-shot and kuk-kuk-killed."

"Clear and concise," applauded Judge. "Name, Tommy?"

"St-stranger."

"No more at present, Tommy," said Henry. "We will dress."

"Fuf-fuf-fifty mum-men down there, and they had to pup-pup-pick me," complained Tommy.

"Judge," said Henry, "your pants usually button in front."

"To hell with precedents in an emergency!" snorted Judge.

"We'll wait for 'em downstairs, Tommy," said Danny.

"My feet are swollen," complained Judge. "Can hardly get my boots on."

"They would fit better, my dear friend, if you had them on the right feet. No matter now, except that you are more splay-footed than usual."

"Are you taking your gun?" queried Judge.

"Why, if I may ask, sir? The man is dead. Come on."

The man was indeed quite dead. He was lying in the dust near the King's Castle hitch-rack, surrounded by a number of men, while Doctor Knowles made an examination by lantern light.

He was a man of possibly forty-five, six feet in height and weighing about a hundred and eighty pounds. He wore a brown suit, brown shoes, brown shirt, with a brown and green necktie. A crushed, brown fedora hat lay on the ground near him.

"Shot twice," said the doctor. "Does anyone know who he is?"

No one replied, until a man said, "I think he came in on the mornin' stage, Doc, and went to the Tonto Hotel. I never seen him since then."

"I seen that feller early this evenin'," said another. "He was looking into the bank windows, and then he went on up the street. It was almost dark."

THE body was removed to Doctor Knowles' house, where the clothes were searched; but his pockets were empty. There was not a single clue as to his iden-

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tity. He had registered at the hotel under the name of John Jones, Chicago, Ill. It seemed that Mr. Jones had spent most of the day in his room.

"Mr. Jones," observed Henry, "traveled exceedingly light. Not a piece of baggage and nothing in his pockets."

"That's what whips me," declared the old hotel clerk. "That there feller had a fancy valise when I showed him to his room. When he went out this evenin', he shore didn't have it with him."

"Well, you lose a customer," said Judge.

"Paid up for five days. Yessir, I charged him four bits a night, and he paid me two and a half, right off the reel. Never even questioned the price, and didn't kick about the pitcher bein' cracked. He was a gent, if I ever seen one."

"Well, Judge," said Henry, "we may as well go back to bed and hope that no more killings disturb our rest."

"We ain't apt to git any more t'night," said the clerk.

CHAPTER II

COME TO A SHOOTING

THEY were a queer pair, these peace officers of Wild Horse Valley. Henry Harrison Conroy was born in a back-stage dressing-room, and for fifty years the theater had been his home. For years he was a headliner in vaudeville, known from coast to coast, a juggling comedian, with a nose like a ripe tomato and the voice of a tragedian.

When vaudeville waned, and the theaters began retrenching on the top salaries, Henry's act was canceled. At the same time Henry received a letter from Tonto City, saying that his uncle had died and left him the JHC cattle outfit. With no knowledge of the cattle business or of the range country, Henry came to Tonto City to claim his inheritance.

The short, fat man with the red nose, immaculate garb, even to spats and a gold-headed cane, amazed Wild Horse Valley. His actions, speech and dress amused the cattle people and appealed to their sense of humor; so at the next election someone suggested writing Henry's name on the ballot for sheriff. Started as a joke, it ended in grim reality.

Wild Horse Valley awoke next morning to find that they had carried the joke too far. Henry realized the extent of the joke, and in order to not be outdone by Wild Horse Valley, he appointed Judge Van Treece, a derelict lawyer, as his deputy. Then, to complete what Judge dubbed "The Shame of Arizona," Henry appointed Oscar Johnson as his jailer.

Van Treece—tall, lean, dignified, and with a mile-long thirst—had gained fame as a criminal lawyer, and might have gone far in his profession, except for that thirst. Oscar Johnson, horse-wrangler on Henry's JHC ranch, was a giant Swede, with very little education and a thirst for battle.

But in spite of it all, the sheriff's office at Tonto City had been effective. Even Henry's bitterest enemies were obliged to admit that this roly-poly, red-nosed person achieved results—in his own way. Both Henry and Judge were atrocious revolver shots, and their horsemanship left much to be desired.

HENRY and Judge did not arise early next morning. As they were eating breakfast in the dining room, the elderly clerk came to them and imparted the knowledge that a stranger had come in on the early stage from Scorpion Bend, and inquired about Mr. Jones.

Henry nodded gravely, and replied that as soon as possible he would have a conversation with this stranger.

But the stranger had not left his room; so Henry sauntered to the bank, where he admired the new gold and black lettering on the window. Frederick Hale, the new banker came out, smiling pleasantly. Hale was tall, slender and good-looking, slightly gray at the temples, and not the usual type of small town banker.

"Slightly overdone, Sheriff," he said smilingly, "but effective."

"Very pretty," said Henry. "Tonto needs new signs."

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"It does," agreed Hale. "The place is rather weather-beaten."

Lawrence Eddy, the new cashier, came out to look at the sign. He was fairly young, with sleek, black hair, well-tailored clothes and a superior air. When he had gone back into the bank, Frederick Hale said:

"A very efficient young man, Sheriff."

"Time," said Henry, "will take off that gloss."

"Perhaps. But we believe in the future of Tonto City."

"Good, good," said Henry absently. "It may have a future, in spite of the fact that it has had mighty little past. I give you good afternoon, sir."

Henry bowed and went toward his office. Frederick Hale smiled thoughtfully and went back into the bank.

Judge Van Treece doted on Shakespeare, and just now he was in the office, tilted back in a chair against the wall, deeply engrossed in a paper-backed edition of the bard of Avon. Seated on an army cot, which groaned under his weight, was Oscar Johnson, nicknamed "The Vitrified Viking," cleaning a rifle. Oscar's button-like nose was streaked with gun-oil.

Henry came in and sat down at his desk, glancing keenly at Oscar, who was quietly humming a song.

"The newly-renovated bank is really a credit to our drab street," remarked Henry. Judge grunted. "Mr. Hale believes in the future of Tonto City," continued Henry.

"Yudge," said Oscar quietly, "do you know de best way to find out if a gon is loaded?"

"Pull the trigger," replied Judge absently.

Wham! The small office shook from the concussion, and a handful of shingles jumped off the roof.

"It vars loaded," stated Oscar blandly.

Judge's glasses had been jarred out to the end of his nose, and he glared angrily at Oscar. Henry stepped gingerly out of the office and looked around. Judge's brows lifted slightly, as he looked up at the hole in the ceiling. Henry came in, followed Judge's gaze and then looked at Oscar, who was calmly wiping his fingers on a rag.

"It vars loaded," repeated Oscar, "and Yudge told me to pull de trigger."

"I told you—Oscar, you seventeen kinds of a damn fool, I—"

"You said, 'Pull de trigger,' und I yust pulled de trigger, Yudge."

"You asked me—oh, what is the use?" sighed Judge.

"After all," remarked Henry, "it only means *another* hole in the ceiling."

JUDGE adjusted his glasses and picked up a newspaper. "Henry, did you read the latest editorial in the Scorpion Bend *Clarion?*" he asked.

Henry sank down in his desk chair and rubbed his red nose.

"You know I never read that scurrilous rag, Judge. What does it say?"

"The editor compliments you, sir," replied Judge.

"Eh? Compliments me? Plain ink—no vitriol, Judge?"

"Change of heart, I suppose. However, here is the heading which says, 'Credit where credit is due.' The editorial follows:

" 'Feeling especially charitable today and with malice toward none, we believe we should compliment the sheriff of Tonto on his ability and the efficiency with which his office has recently functioned. Perhaps, in the past, we have been unduly harsh in our criticism of the estimable Sheriff Conroy and his queerly assorted crew; but if our constructive criticism has borne fruit, we feel justified in the manner in which the paper's editorials goaded the Tonto peace officers into action. We do not want to pat ourselves on the back—but.' "

Henry's eyes were closed during the reading, but now he opened them slowly.

"The only good thing about it is brevity, Judge," he said. "I do like that 'strangely assorted crew,' idea. But I do not like his unmitigated gall in claiming the credit for our actions. Credit to him—indeed! The

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malicious little sidewinder will make us the laughing stock of Wild Horse Valley. Goaded by a newspaper! Faugh! Judge, is there any of Frijole's prune whisky left? I need something to remove the taste of that egotistical editorial from my palate."

Judge turned to Oscar.

"Slave, fetch the demijohn."

"Yah—su-ure," grinned Oscar, and went back into the jail.

Frijole Bill Cullison, cook at Henry's JHC ranch, spent most of his spare time—and much of Henry's—concocting and distilling prunes, rice, raisins and any other fruit or grain that might be handy at the time. No two batches were ever the same, except that they were always potent.

Judge filled the three tin cups to the brim.

"Here is to law and order, my friends," he said grandly. "For more than three months we have not even had a fist-fight in Tonto—until this murder. Civilization has reached Wild Horse Valley; or can it be that the criminal element are afraid to enter our domain?"

"I believe that is it, sir," stated Henry soberly.

"Afraid of our unrelenting war against crime, Henry?"

"Oh, no—not that, Judge. Afraid of laughing themselves to death. Please do not interrupt. What I can see about me, I can see in my own mirror. To your health, gentlemen."

They drained their cups. Judge said to Oscar, "What is your opinion, my Viking?"

"Ay t'ink," said Oscar quietly, "that Frijole is getting vorse. He put too much hurse-liniment in de last batch."

"Hark!" exclaimed Henry. "Listen a moment."

There were loud voices on the street, and someone came running down the wooden sidewalk, making a great clatter.

"Bragging too soon!" snorted Judge.

The runner was the immaculate Lawrence Eddy, cashier at the new bank, entirely out of breath and slightly disheveled.

"Come to the bank—quick!" he panted. "Attempted holdup, and a man shot!"

CHAPTER III

HORSE-THIEVES!

SHOWING surprising agility for their age and size, Henry and Judge ran almost a dead-heat to the bank, with Oscar thumping behind. Quite a crowd had gathered about the agitated Frederick Hale.

"Keep them back from the doorway, Oscar," ordered Henry. He and Judge went went into the bank, where the banker led them back to his little private office near the rear.

The room was furnished with only a long table and several chairs. Between the table and the doorway sprawled the body of a man, face up. The fingers of his right hand still clutched the butt of a Colt .38.

"Someone has gone for Doctor," said the banker. Henry looked that man over closely. He was possibly fifty years of age, dressed fairly well. He wore a huge garnet ring on his right hand, but that seemed to be all his jewelry.

"Your cashier said it was attempted robbery," said Henry.

"That was his intention," said Hale. "He came in and asked about a Mr. John Jones. When I told him I'd never heard of Jones, he said he wanted to talk business with me; so I brought him back here. When we were inside the room, with the door closed, he drew a gun. He said, 'I want money and I want a lot of it.'

"Before I could explain anything, he said, 'You will go to the doorway and ask your cashier to bring you ten thousand dollars in currency. When he brings it, I shall lock you both in this room, until I can make a getaway. If either of you fails, I shall kill you both, if possible. I warn you that I am a good shot.'

"But he overlooked the fact that I was armed, Sheriff. As I stepped past him, going toward the door, I bumped him with my left shoulder, throwing him off balance, and before he could turn to shoot, I drew my gun and shot him."

Old Dr. Knowles came bustling in, ignored everybody and went to work on his examination.

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"The man is dead," he said. "Shot directly through the heart."

"I am sorry," said Hale. "I had to do it."

"You were very fortunate, sir," said Judge soberly.

Dr. Knowles, being the coroner, assisted Henry in a search of the man. His trouser pockets contained a few dollars in silver, a knife, several keys and some matches. A search of his coat pockets drew a complete blank, until Henry dug deeply in one pocket and took out a sheet of paper, folded into a small size. One side of the sheet was covered with writing, which proved to be the chorus of an old Spanish love song, translated into English.

"I'll get some of the boys to help carry him away," said the elderly doctor. "Have you any idea who he is, Henry?"

"Not the slightest, Doc. Perhaps someone in town knew him. I have never seen the man before, I am very sure."

"Is there anything I can do?" asked Hale anxiously.

"Just be glad that you saved your money—perhaps your life," replied Henry. "The man must have been desperate."

Henry and Judge went back to the office, where they partook of Frijole's distillation again.

"Not even a fist-fight," remarked Henry sarcastically. "Perhaps the criminal element are afraid of our unrelenting war against crime."

"Our efficiency has spread to the banker, it seems," murmured Judge. "At any rate, Henry, the case is closed. That man attempted to rob the bank and was killed. One dead outlaw, and the money still in the bank. I drink to Mr. Frederick Hale, a welcome addition to our law-abiding community."

Henry pulled out a large drawer in his desk and removed a huge stack of reward notices, which had been collected for several years. Judge looked narrowly at Henry. Ever so often the rotund sheriff would go through that collection, slowly and seriously, scanning each picture and reading the text carefully on those which did not carry a picture of the wanted man.

Judge secured his old copy of Shakespeare, tilted back against the wall, and adjusted his reading glasses. Oscar came in.

"Das ha'ar man come in on morning stage from Scorpion Bend," he announced. "He told de hotel his name vors Tom Marsh."

"Anybody know him?" asked Judge.

Oscar shook his head. "Yust a stranger, Yudge. Hanry, you vant me to clean your seex-shooter?"

"If you please, Oscar," replied Henry, deeply engrossed in a reward notice.

Judge tossed his book aside, put his glasses in his pocket, and left the office hurriedly.

JOHN CAMPBELL, the big, gray-haired prosecuting attorney, sauntered in and sat down. "I saw Judge hurrying away," he remarked. Henry nodded.

"Just one of his superstitions, John. He thinks it is bad luck to be here when Oscar is cleaning a gun."

John Campbell glanced up at the numerous bullet holes in the ceiling, and nodded slowly. "Few superstitions are as well founded," he said. "I was down at Doc's place, taking a look at the corpse. No one seems to know who the man was. Hale had never seen him before."

"His right name," stated Henry, "was Thomas Mitchell, alias Tom Miller, alias Tom Marsh, wanted for smuggling Chinamen and drugs from Mexico two years ago at El Paso. He has a crescent-shaped scar over his right eye, a scar on the left side of his nose, where a mole had been removed—and is said to have a very good baritone voice. Everything checks, except the voice, John; and I found the English translation of a Spanish song in his pocket."

"You found all that on a reward notice, Henry?"

"No reward," smiled Henry. "Merely a wanted man."

Campbell leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigar.

"Our new banker seems very efficient, Henry. A few more business men like him, and we would not need a sheriff."

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Henry nodded soberly. "And yet," he said, "it would seem that Mr. Mitchell, with all his aliases, was a careless man. He overlooked the fact that the banker was armed, and also gave the banker an opportunity to shoulder him off balance."

"You doubt the banker's story, Henry?"

"Of course not, John; I merely decry the mental caliber of Mr. Mitchell. Would you like to sample some of Frijole Bill's latest distillation, John?"

"I would not!" replied the lawyer flatly. "The last time I tried that infernal concoction I mounted my horse backwards and came all the way home in a dazed condition. My wife swears that I forced her to sit in a straight-back chair and listen while I recited the Declaration of Independence."

"Quite possible," agreed Henry soberly. "Frijole tells some wonderful tales of what the mash does to William Shakespeare, the ranch rooster."

"I have heard some of them, Henry. By the way, have you seen Hale's daughter?"

"Who hasn't?" countered Henry, smiling. "When she walks down the street, John —*mm-m-m-m-m*. I would venture to say that every cowboy in Wild Horse Valley has washed his neck twice during the past week. Why, I caught Frijole Bill polishing his boots with stove polish, and even Thunder and Lightning are wearing their Sunday red ties every day."

"I suppose that Oscar is still true to Josephine Swensen."

Oscar looked up quickly. "To ha'al vit vimmin," he said.

"You haven't quarreled with Josephine again, I hope," said Henry.

"Yosephine is alvays talking about yentlemen dis and yentlemen dat, and den she vent to chorch vit a Yerman miner named Yoe. Ay ask her if Yoe is a yentleman, and she said he was porfect yentleman, 'cause he didn't ask to kiss her goodbye."

"What did you say, Oscar?" asked Henry.

"Va'al, Ay didn't mean it yust like it sounded."

"And now there is a rift in your lute."

"Yah?" Oscar looked up quickly. "Va'al, Ay don't know about dat, but dere vars a rip in my shirt. You vant me to load dis gon?"

"No thank you, Oscar," replied Henry huskily. "Just place the gun and cartridges on my desk. Thank you for cleaning it."

"You are velcome, Ay am su-ure."

OSCAR walked out, leaving Henry wiping his eyes. Josephine Swensen was waitress and chamber maid at the Tonto Hotel; a tall, lean, hard-featured woman, with a huge mop of colorless hair, a penchant for queer-looking clothes, especially hats, and the ability to swap punches with anyone. She had been Oscar's light o' love for several years, and their battles were proverbial.

"You will hold the inquest tomorrow, Henry?" asked the lawyer.

"A double bill," nodded Henry. "Did you hear how the two officers are getting along, John?"

"Very well. I dropped in at Doc's place a while ago. Two more of the Patrol were there. Usually those boys are pretty tight-lipped, but right now they're mad. Those men fired upon Vickers and Bennett without any warning. Bennett says they heard the sound of taut wires, as they were riding the trail, and when they rode to investigate, they were fired upon."

"After all," sighed Henry, "a *contrabandista* is a dangerous man, and those two boys could hardly expect abject surrender."

"That's true, Henry."

"Crime," remarked Henry thoughtfully, "was quiescent for several months, but now it appears rampant. Is there any news of an impending revolution in Mexico, John?"

"Yes, there seems to be a certain talk of it, Henry. The usual thing, I suppose—a demand for horses and guns."

"That reminds me of something. I told Danny to hire Zell Hork and Nick Balleau to help him round up some young stock and throw them on the north range. We cannot tempt a horse-thief too much."

"That's right," said the lawyer. "I heard

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Steve Malloy wailing about living too close to the Border. He bought several hundred Mexican calves, and he's afraid of cattle rustlers, in case war breaks out down there."

Steve Malloy owned the Quarter Circle M, a small ranch, due south from Tonto City, and, right on the border. Nick Balleau and Zell Hork were his two punchers.

IT WAS late that afternoon when Danny Regan brought Nick Balleau and Zell Hork to the office. They had put twenty-five JHC horses in the home corral, instead of out on the north range. Henry paid off the two cold-jawed punchers from the Quarter Circle M, and they headed for the King's Castle Saloon.

"Some pretty good lookin' stuff in that herd, Henry," said Danny, "and I thought we'd break a few of 'em. Mostly three-year-olds, and some that might make polo ponies. Plenty speed, if yuh ask me. Why don't you and Judge come out to the ranch for supper?"

Judge groaned audibly. He hated horseback riding. Henry hated it as much as Judge, but was too proud to admit it. They saddled their horses, Judge complaining bitterly about his rheumatism.

"Growing pains," said Henry.

"Growing? At my age?"

"Growing old, Judge."

On the way to the ranch they met Thunder and Lightning Mendoza, two diminutive Mexicans who worked on the JHC for Henry. They were in the ranch buckboard, looking very important as they drew up. Except for Oscar Johnson, they were probably the worst drivers in the valley.

"It ees like these," explained Lightning. "Frijole ees ron out from flour in the brad. He ees saying that we don't need oats-mill, too—much. We have not got planty botter and the bacon ees fresh out tomorrow."

"I see," nodded Henry. "In other words, the larder needs replenishing."

"Sure," agreed Lightning. "We get lard too, I theenk."

"How is Frijole?" asked Henry.

"Frijole," said Thunder, "ees ver' sore."

"What is wrong with him?" queried Judge.

"Wa-a-a-al," drawled Lightning, "it ees like theese. Frijole make some new prune leeker. Oh, smals ver' good. Frijole tell Thunder to breeng the horse-leenement, wheech makes the firs'-class taste for the neck. Wa-a-a-al, Thunder mak' meestake and breeng the torpentine."

"And he put turpentine in it by mistake?" asked Henry.

"Oh, jus' leetle beet. Maybe two, t'ree quart."

"Merely a dash, eh?" smiled Henry. "You two better have Oscar come back with you."

"You theenk we can' drive good?" queried Thunder.

"How much money have you two?" countered Henry.

"I'm having one dollar and seex-beets," confessed Lightning.

"You better ask Oscar to drive back. A dollar and six-bits will buy a lot of tequila."

"I cross your heart, you hope I die," swore Lightning. "My leetle brodder and me are swore up on tequila."

"Swore off, eh?" queried Judge. "When did you swear off?"

"Las' Chreestmus."

"Last Christmas! You've been drunk fifty times since then."

Lightning shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe?* Maybe we forgeet."

"Well," said Henry, "don't forget to ask Oscar to drive back to the ranch."

"We tell heem," agreed Lightning. "But jus' the same, I theenk we can drive worse than heem—I hope."

"I doubt it," said Henry, "but there is a chance that Oscar will be sober enough to make the curves. That is the only buckboard we have left—what there is left of it."

FRIJOLE BILL CULLISON, sixty, small, wiry, with a lean little face and whiskers like a bob-cat, greeted them soberly.

"I knowed yuh was a-comin' out."

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"Second sight or a crystal ball?" asked Judge soberly.

"Huh? Oh! No, it wasn't that. Yuh see, I aimed to have some fried chicken for supper next time yuh showed up, and I says to m'self a while ago, 'Jist as shore as hell, they'll come t'day.' "

"Meaning that we will have fried chicken," smiled Henry.

"Yuh would have, Henry—except for Bill Shakespeare."

"That," declared Judge, "is a lie before you tell it, Frijole."

"Well, I tell yuh, it ain't no lie, Judge," protested Frijole.

Henry sat down on the porch and mopped his face with a handkerchief. "Proceed, Frijole," he said. "It sounds interesting."

"Thank yuh, Henry," said Frijole, glowering at Judge, who glowered right back at him.

"Yuh see," began Frijole, "I noticed Bill Shakespeare a-settin' on the corral fence, watchin' Danny and them two rannahans from the Quarter Circle M corral twenty-five broncs. That started it. Yuh see, Old Bill's been havin' trouble with a bobcat from Smoke Tree Canyon lately. Twice he done forked that cat, but got throwed.

"Well, I went out to the shop and I made Bill a pair of spurs. I strapped 'em onto his lean ol' shanks and I says, 'Bill, you jist sock these into that fuzz-tailed pussie, and yuh can ride him to hell and back.'

"This mornin' I done brought off a mess of prune whisky, and I'd plumb forgot about Old Bill gettin' his beak into the mash. Why, he ain't been on a toot for three weeks, and I reckon he jist kinda let hisself go, 'cause the next thing I knowed I seen him staggerin' down to the stable.

"I figgered I'd take them spurs off him until he sobered up, but all to once I seen that bobcat circle the corner of the stable, with Old Bill a-ridin' him straight up. They cut around the corner, and the next thing I knowed, there goes every danged chicken on the ranch, strung out and goin' like hell toward Smoke Tree Canyon, with Old Bill a-rompin' along behind them on that bobcat, his new spurs socked to the shanks.

"Old Bill was shore a-rockin' and a ridin', but guidin' the destiny of that scared bobcat. So, yuh see, there ain't a danged chicken left on the ranch."

"That's a lie!" snorted Judge. "A rooster riding a wildcat—why, the idea is ridiculous."

"That's jist what I said, Judge," declared Frijole. "But after all, what's an idea to a rooster?"

Henry wiped his eyes and had difficulty with his voice. "The—er—liquor turned out all right?" he asked huskily.

"Prettiest stuff you ever seen, Henry. Yuh can stand six feet from a keg of it, and yuh can hear it moan."

"Moan?" snorted Judge. "Ridiculous! What makes it moan?"

"Gettin' old so damn fast," replied Frijole soberly.

"We understood," said Henry, "that Thunder made the mistake of putting turpentine in it, instead of horse-liniment."

"Oh, they told yuh, eh? Let 'em think so. I had to do somethin' to keep them two out of my private stock."

Henry chuckled at Frijole's scheme. "But why put anything in it?" he asked.

"Matter of taste and protection, Henry. Horse liniment gives it a tang, and—well, it kinda comes along behind and heals up anythin' the other stuff happens to bite into. Well, I better git busy on some supper for you boys. Sorry about the chickens."

OSCAR, Thunder and Lightning did not arrive for supper. The new batch of prune liquor met with the approval of Judge and Henry, and also the critical taste of Frijole Bill.

"She shore crackles to the taste," said Frijole, "and yuh don't need to be finicky. I tried a few drops on a flour-sack, and she reacted fine."

"I'll bet it cut a hole in the sack," said Judge.

"Oh shore it did. But I'll tell yuh this much: she never left no frayed edges."

After supper they looked at the twenty-five head of horses in the corral.

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"What do yuh think of 'em?" queried Danny.

"As far as I can see," replied Henry soberly, "each has four legs and one tail. However, the colors vary, which is natural, I suppose."

"They're all partly broken," said Danny.

"Partly broken means what?" asked Henry.

"I know that one," said Judge soberly. "A partly broken horse only bucks when you mount him."

"I reckon that covers it," grinned Danny.

. . . Judge and Henry played cribbage and sampled Frijole's brew until nearly midnight; but Oscar, Thunder and Lightning did not come. Frijole slept in a little room off the kitchen. Danny gave up his room to Henry and Judge, and slept on a cot in the main room.

Henry and Judge had been in bed only a few minutes when they heard the creak of the springs on Danny's cot, as he got out of bed.

"Anything wrong, Danny?" asked Henry.

"A noise outside," replied Danny. "Listen! Sounds like them horses are millin' around. Damn it, I never can find my boots in the dark!"

"What is all the fuss about, if I may ask?" yawned Judge. "Lie down, Henry; you've uncovered me completely."

Then came the thudding report of a revolver shot. Danny swore as he yanked on his pants. Henry said:

"What is it, Danny?"

"Horse-thieves! They've shot the padlock."

CHAPTER IV

MUH-MUH-MURDER

HENRY and Judge almost upset the bed, pawing around in the dark for their clothes. They could hear the thud of running hoofs, as the herd circled the house on the hard-packed ground, and the whooping and yelling as the rustlers stampeded the heard toward the main gate.

Henry and Judge did not wait for clothes. Clad in only their full length underwear they headed for the doorway. Danny was outside, and they heard the reports of his six-shooter as he blazed away in the dark.

"I have the shotgun!" yelled Judge. "I'll fix them!"

"And everyone else!" yelped Henry. "Be-e-e-e careful, Judge!"

They jammed in the doorway together, but tore loose. Out of that haze of moonlit dust came two running horses, straight for the porch. Almost obscured behind them came the buckboard, bouncing like a rubber ball. Other loose horses had turned and were coming back with the team and buckboard.

An instant later the team swung aside just in time for the two wheels on the left side of the buckboard to crash into the porch. For a moment the air was full of broken wheels and other parts of the equipage, along with porch-posts and splintered boards.

Something hooked under Henry's chin, throwing him backwards into the house, and he dimly heard the crash as Judge fired both barrels of the shotgun through the porch roof before being knocked off the porch.

There was a following crash, as the runaway buckboard team failed to avoid the corral. Then there was comparative silence for a few moments, broken by Judge's complaining voice:

"Do not ask me, sir. I have no idea what happened. Certainly, I was there, but just at present I must be excused from trying to make any coherent statement."

From inside the house came a husky voice, saying:

"Who in de ha'al vars to blame? Not me! Ay am yust as innocent as—oh, hallo, Hanry!"

"I give you good evening, sir," replied Henry. "Caesar's ghost, I believe I was kicked by an elephant! Is that you, Oscar?"

"Yah, su-ure. Ay t'ought Ay hord Yudge's voice."

"Judge? Oh, of course. He had escaped

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my mind entirely. Queer how one forgets. I hope he is all right. My goodness, I remember that shotgun! Judge! Oh, Judge!"

Danny came stumbling over the wrecked porch in time to hear Henry calling Judge.

"Are you all right, Henry?" he asked quickly.

"I feel rather silly, with my head under a chair, but I suppose it is a normal position under the circumstances."

Danny lighted the lamp, just as Judge came staggering in. The staggering was due to the fact that his union suit had been torn loose from each shoulder, and was now hunched around his bony knees. Beyond some sanded spots on his anatomy, he seemed all right.

Danny removed the chair from over Henry's head. Oscar was sitting upright against the wall, about six feet of lines still gripped in his right hand.

"Ay don't vant to be personal," stated Oscar, "but Ay feel that somet'ing vent wrong. Ve are coming back from town and oll to vonce, right by de gate, ve are run into by a herd of hurses. Den somebody shot a gon right by my team, and ha'al bruk loose."

"Aptly stated," nodded Henry.

"Oscar saved the herd," said Danny. "He blocked the gate long enough to turn that herd, and most of 'em went east. I'll bet there wasn't five of 'em that made the gate."

"Ay am smort faller," declared Oscar.

"I admire the decoration on the sofa," said Henry. "I always did feel that a buckboard wheel, with half the spokes missing, would be very, very ornamental."

"But what," asked Judge wearily, "became of Thunder and Lightning, Oscar?"

"Yudas Priest! Ay forgot de two! Dey ver in de back of de bockboard, along vit sacks flour, oatmeal and butter. Oh, my!"

TWO queer-looking figures came in over the broken porch. They were Thunder and Lightning, dusted white with flour and smeared with butter. The three men stared at them in the lamplight.

"Buenas noches, amigos," said Lightning. "How am I, you hope? These ees my leetle brodder."

"You both look terrible," said Henry soberly.

"Sure," agreed Lightning. "Everytheeng ees bad those day."

Frijole managed to awaken, and came stumbling through the kitchen into the main room, where he stood and looked them over, a queer little figure, in sagging, red underwear, a misfit sombrero on his head.

"I dreamed about runnin' horses and folks shootin'—and look what it turned into!" he said. "My gawsh, Judge! Shoulder-pads and hopples! And at yore age. Ain't yuh got no shame?"

"How are you filling, I hope?" asked Lightning. Frijole considered the flour-covered Mexicans and rubbed his stubbled chin.

"Gawsh, you two must have been awful drunk to git like that," he said huskily. "Where at's my flour?"

Lightning gestured wearily, sending a shower of flour dust from his sleeves.

"You—you incompetent, unreliable, nut-headed, scrambled-brains!" wailed Frijole. "Yuh can't even go to town after—"

"Hush, Frijole," interrupted Henry. "This is no time for recriminations. Bring out the jug again, if you please. In times of great disaster, we must remain calm and collected."

"Disaster, huh? So that's what it was. All right. I'll wake up after while and I'll laugh like hell. I allus make up my mind that I'll tell all about my dream next mornin', but I never can remember what happened. Do you have that trouble, Henry?"

"Ordinarily—yes. But I think we will all remember this one next morning. Just bring the jug, and do not worry about the dream."

THEY were up fairly early next morning, looking over the damage. The buckboard was smashed beyond repair, and the front porch looked as if it had been struck by a cyclone.

Both Judge and Henry were stiff and sore, but the rest of them were all right.

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Lightning and Thunder still had flour paste in their hair.

The rustlers had smashed the padlock with a bullet. It apparently had resisted their efforts to break the chain or lock with a small steel bar. But Danny was sure that their efforts had been in vain, as far as stealing the herd was concerned. Lightning threw a little light on the subject, when he said:

"My onkle, wheech ees Juan Fernandez, on Agua Frio, he ees tell me last night that the *Mejicano soldadoes* look for horse for the army. The man who ees buy from these army ees een Agua Frio. My onkle he ees saying that eef I can still cople horses and breeng them to heem, I can get pretty damn reech—I hope."

"So that's it!" snorted Danny. "Rustlin' horses for the Mexican buyers. Well, they didn't show much profit last night. Who's that down the road, raisin' all that dust?"

The fast-traveling rider proved to be Tommy Roper, manager of the livery stable at Tonto City. A very likable, well-intentioned young man; but about his speech he could do nothing.

He made a fast dismount from his saddle, took a deep breath and said, "Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh—"

"Sheriff," prompted Henry calmly. "Take it easy, Tommy, my lad."

Tommy drew another big breath, bobbed his head and said:

"Zeh—Zeh—Zeh—Zell Huh—Huh—Hork was sh-sh—he's dud-dead."

"Zell Hork was shot and he is dead," translated Henry.

"Where was he shot?" asked Judge anxiously.

"I—I— dud-dud-didn't see the huh-huh-hole."

"Where was the body found?" asked Henry.

"Well"—Tommy drew another deep breath—"it was bub-back of the Tut-Tut-Tonto, bub-by the old cuc-cuc-cuc—"

"By the old corral," nodded Henry. "When?"

"Hours ago," replied Tommy. "I gug-gug-got that out all rur-right."

"You show some improvement, Tommy," said Henry. "The body of Zell Hork was found this morning behind the Tonto Saloon, and near that old corral. Quite dead, of course. I wonder if anyone heard the shots fired?"

"Yuh-yuh-yes."

"Judge, we may as well go to Tonto and see about this. Tommy, have you had breakfast?"

Tommy shook his head. Frijole said, "If yuh promise to not try and thank me, I'll cook yuh a breakfast, Tommy. Jist nod, if it's satisfactory."

Tommy nodded and grinned widely.

CHAPTER V

KNOW SHANGHAI CHARLEY?

THE body of Zell Hork had been moved down to Doctor Knowles' office, when Henry and Judge reached Tonto. Danny Regan rode in with them. Hork had been shot in the left side—shot from behind—and had bled to death.

Henry soon gathered all the particulars.

About one o'clock in the morning two shots had been heard. No one paid much attention. Early in the morning the blacksmith saw a saddled horse, tied to the corral fence, and went over to the animal. Just beyond the animal, and inside the corral, was the body.

Hork's gun was in the corral beside him, and it had been fired once. Henry, Judge and the doctor went to examine the spot where the body had been found. The horse was still there.

"Word has been sent to Steve Malloy," said the doctor.

Danny examined the horse and saddle, and when they went back to the office he said to Henry:

"That's the same horse that Zell rode yesterday, Henry; but that saddle belongs to Nick Balleau."

Henry nodded and thanked Danny, who added, "Nick will prob'ly explain how that happened."

"I believe," said Henry quietly, "that we will not question Mr. Balleau. That is,

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we will not ask for an explanation now."

"Suits me all right," said Danny. "Yuh see, Zell's saddle had a lot of silver on it. Cost three, four times as much as this one."

"Well," sighed Judge, "we have had three killings in this town, only a short time apart. One, of course, was justified."

"A killing," said Henry, "is always justified—by the killer."

Steve Malloy and Nick Balleau came to town. They looked at the body of Zell Hork, swore that they did not know of any enemy that Zell might have had, and led the horse back with them. Neither of them mentioned the exchange of saddles. Danny said to Henry:

"Neither Malloy nor Balleau rode Zell Hork's saddle. Balleau rode an old hull that never cost over twenty-five dollars, when it was new."

Henry nodded thoughtfully. "Danny," he said, "in riding around with Hork and Balleau, did you learn anything about them?"

"Very little, replied Danny. "They're a tight-lipped pair. In fact, Malloy never talks much either. I've been down at the Quarter Circle M, but I never felt welcome. Never since Malloy bought the old Willard place and registered his own brand has he been a bit neighborly. Maybe it's just his way—I dunno. He stocked his spread with Mexican calves, and they've got a few broncs. I've heard that they buy most of their drinks at Agua Frio."

A young woman, well dressed, walked past them, nodded pleasantly and entered the bank. She was Marion Hale, daughter of the new banker.

"Very pretty," murmured Henry.

"Doggone good-lookin'," admitted Danny. "I'll bet half the cowpunchers in the valley will start washin' their necks."

"Yes, Danny—and so will you."

"Not me. A little too young and a little too pretty."

"Anyway," said Henry, "Banker Hale said she is studying design in San Francisco, and will only be here occasionally. He said she might come over once a month to see her old dad."

"What's design, Henry?"

"Oh, I suppose it means the designing of something—possibly hats or gowns."

"She wouldn't get very rich at that job in Wild Horse Valley," said Danny. "Well, I'll be driftin' along. I'm goin' to try and pick up a bunch of those horses."

THE triple inquest brought little result. No one seemed to know anything about the two strangers.

Jim Morton, chief of the Border Patrol for that district, was at the inquest. Morton was middle-aged, grizzled, and hard-faced. A job on the desert Border Patrol is decidedly not a beauty treatment.

He came to the sheriff's office after the inquest, where they discussed the attack on Vickers and Bennett.

"Things are gettin' worse down here," declared Morton. "We've only had to contend with petty smuggling for a year or more, but it looks like bigger things were going on. Sheriff, did you ever hear of Shanghai Charley?"

"No," replied Henry, "but he sounds interesting, sir."

"Shanghai Charley," said the officer, "was the finest judge of jewels, especially diamonds, in the world. He became invaluable to those buying contraband jewels. His appraisal was honest. We knew him for what he was, but it is not illegal to appraise jewels. But when Shanghai Charley showed up, we were on our guard, because he did not mess around with any petty deals."

"Interesting to say the least," murmured Henry. "Worked on a commission?"

"That's right. Only a few days ago one of my men spotted Shanghai Charley in Scorpion Bend."

"Well, my goodness!" exclaimed Henry.

"Then he disappeared," continued the officer. "We watched closely for him, but he eluded us. I found him today, Sheriff."

"You found him? Where, if I may ask?"

"He was the stranger who was shot out by the King's Castle hitching-post."

"No!"

"Absolutely. We heard about the shooting, but were led to believe that a cowboy was killed."

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"But there was not a single thing on his person," said Henry. "Not even a match."

"That's kinda queer, Sheriff."

"Exactly. But it proves that Shanghai Charley was stripped of everything before he was shot. He was brought there and dropped. The shots we heard were merely to cause an investigation, and cause us to believe that the man was shot at that spot."

Jim Morton smiled slowly. "I believe you're right, Sheriff. We will be interested to know who killed him."

"Yes," replied Henry dryly, "and if anyone comes and demands the right to confess the murder, I shall notify you at once, sir."

Henry told Judge about the identity of Shanghai Charley, and also recited what Jim Morton had told about Shanghai Charley's profession. Judge was impressed.

"Then," he said, "the man killed in the bank—Thomas Mitchell, alias Tom Miller, alias Tom Marsh—may have been an accomplice of Shanghai Charley. You remember, he asked about Mr. Jones, who turns out to be Shanghai Charley, but Mr. Jones was already cooling off in the morgue. What do you make of it, Henry?"

"Judge," replied Henry soberly, "I am really surprised at myself, because I am unable to make anything of it. For instance, Shanghai Charley, unknown, as far as we know, in this country, is shot down at the King's Castle hitch-rack. Then a man, who evidently knew this Shanghai Charley, came to town and attempted to rob the bank, but was put in cold-storage with Shanghai Charley.

"Then a common or garden variety of cowboy died with a bullet in his back in a corral behind the King's Castle Saloon. He is said to have started for Agua Frio, and is said to have had no enemies. Three dead men in a space of a few hours—and not a clue to the death of two."

"I am anxiously awaiting the next issue of the Scorpion Bend *Clarion*," said Judge.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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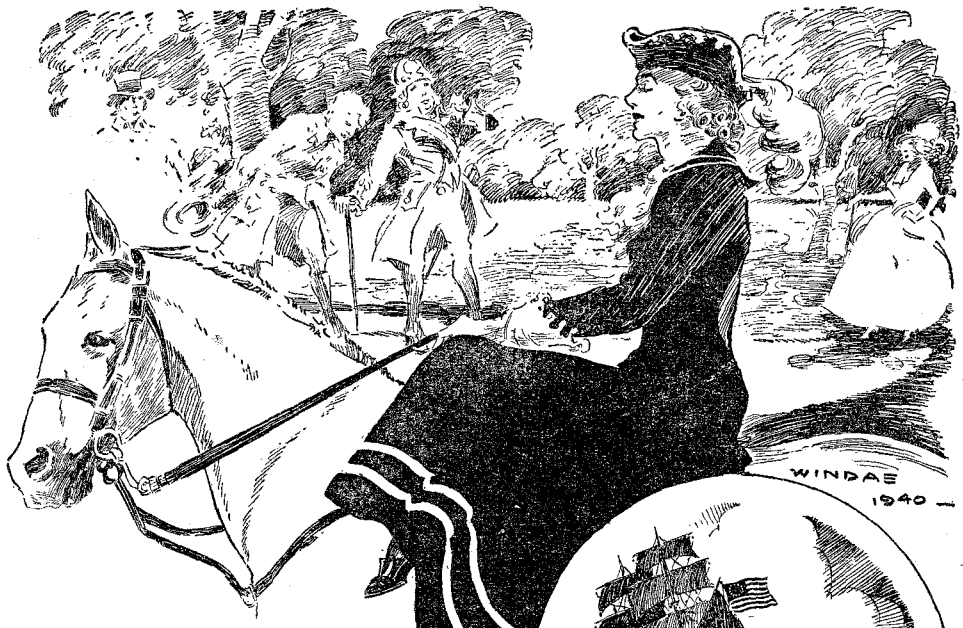
LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

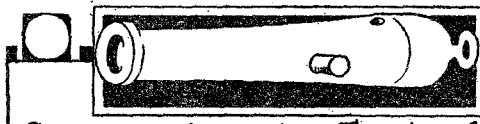
ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS



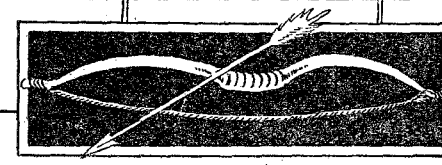
• NAVY BLUE •

Because of the prestige of the British Navy, blue has long been the universal color of the sailor's uniform the world over. Blue, however, was not the original color of British Naval uniforms. Red, or red and gray, were once the favored colors. King George II, struck by the smart blue and white riding habit of the Duchess of Bedford, ordered these colors to be regulation for the navy. Thus, because of a King's whim, blue and white became the traditional colors of the world's seamen.

FIRST SHIP *to* FLY *the* STARS *and* STRIPES was the U·S·S·RANGER, during the Revolutionary War, when John Paul Jones took command of the vessel.



SIZE OF CANNON • The size of a gun was designated by the weight of its shot in pounds until the 19th Century. Since then, it is estimated by diameter of the bore in inches. Half the cube of the diameter (in inches) gives the approximate weight of the shell, (in pounds).



• **TOXIC** • This word is derived from "Toxon," Greek for archer's bow. Arrows were often dipped in poison, and the word "Toxon" came to mean the poison in which the arrows were dipped, rather than the arrows themselves. From this come our "Toxic" "Toxin", etc.

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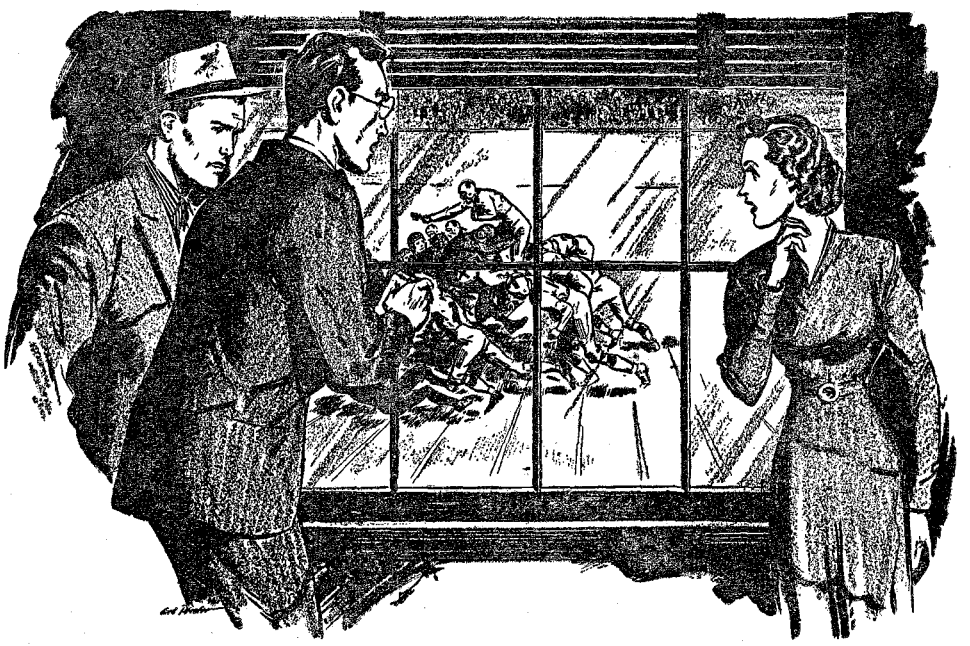

"I understand now," Mallet said in a tight voice. "I have been simply a—uh—Charles McCarthy"

Touchdown, Professor!

Start now this rollicking story of football, and an Einstein who wanted to be a Rockne

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

AN ASTONISHINGLY unworldly scientist, Professor AVERY MALLET of Bradfield College has dared to question the good taste and judgment of HORACE LIVERMORE, the college's wealthiest alumnus. He has dared to suggest that the thousands of dollars Livermore is spending on Bradfield football might better go to the Landis Scientific Foundation, Mallet's particular baby. Nettled, Livermore has announced that he will shortly issue a challenge to Professor Mallet.

BILL PORTER of the *Globe* is on hand to get the story, along with MIKE RAFFERTY, the two-bottle cameraman. And the story is a beauty. After a good deal of windy hokum about the dangers of specialization and the value of teamwork, Horace Livermore announces that he will present two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the Landis Scientific Foundation—if Professor Mallet will take over the coaching of the Bradfield football team, and produce a winning season. To the consternation of everybody but himself, Avery Mallet promptly accepts.

BILL PORTER'S angry sympathy for Mallet is particularly intense because the lean and owlish professor's wife is a lovely girl named ERIKA, who attracts Porter more strongly than he cares to admit. His anger increases when he discovers that Livermore has put over a very neat and dirty doublecross.

Livermore has hired CHUCK HEDGES, one of the country's best coaches, to take over just as soon as Avery Mallet admits failure; he has lined up JOHNNY HARRELL, Bradfield's captain, to sabotage Mallet's efforts at coaching. It's all going to be very, very funny, Livermore says.

This story began in last week's Argosy

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Loudly proclaiming himself a sucker, Bill Porter agrees to help Mallet with the coaching; and his will be really valuable, for Porter was once a celebrated All-American. Two other people rally to the Mallet cause: Doc MEADE, the gloomy trainer, and a sophmore back named DUCKY POOLE. Poole is a garage mechanic who plays football for Bradfield because he gets well paid for it; he's a practical young man with an intense dislike for Moneybags Livermore.

Avery Mallet doesn't know the first thing about football, and Bill Porter has to prepare notes for the coach's opening talk to the squad. Primed by young Harrell, the squad listens in stony and insulting silence while Mallet stammers through those notes, which a breeze eventually snatches from his hands. He remembers to order the boys out to the field for setting-up exercises, but they do not move—until Ducky Poole gets to his feet. "You heard him," the young mechanic says. "What are you waiting for?" And they go, Johnny Harrell taking Mallet's notes with him. . . .

CHAPTER VII

IT PAYS TO COOPERATE

JOHNNY HARRELL squirmed. "Things are not working out quite as we counted, sir," he said. He did not look happy.

Horace Livermore felt no stirring of alarm. He had just eaten a very excellent dinner with which he had had a bottle of Pommard. His cigar was burning evenly. The leather armchair in his quarters at the Kappa House was deep and well padded.

"I've got to admit he's lasted longer than I expected, Johnny. Four days, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

Chuck Hedges, the third person in the room, scowled at his stubby fingers. "You can't let it go too far, Mr. Livermore, if we're to have any chance of getting in shape for the State game."

Livermore was still unconcerned. "The squad's in shape, isn't it? From all I hear, Mallet's run you ragged with calesthenics and hotfooting it around the cinder track. And you've been getting familiar with Hedges' system here in the evening, haven't you? In a day or two . . ."

"*Some* of us have been working with Mr. Hedges," Harrell said.

Livermore glanced at the football captain. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"We're having trouble with part of the squad, sir," said Harrell. "They're mostly sophomores, but they make up more than a third and they're stringing with Mallet."

"What are you talking about? I thought you told me, before I went to town, that the whole squad was willing to trail along with us?"

"Well, sir, all the gang here *is* willing," said Harrell. "I'm afraid I took it for granted that the rest of them would follow our lead. It seems I was wrong."

"I think Mr. Livermore should know exactly what's gone on while he's been in town," Hedges said.

"Well, sir, Mallet turned up the first day to make his speech. He had some notes, but they blew off the desk and he had to go on by himself." Harrell laughed, remembering. "It was a terrible frost. I thought maybe he'd give up the ghost right then. We were handing him one fine freezing. Then this Poole got up and started the sophomore bunch out onto the field. It spoiled things."

"Ducky Poole?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you talk to him about it afterward?"

Harrell nodded. "He said he was being paid to play football and he was taking orders from the coach, whoever he happened to be. He said he couldn't waste time with horseplay."

"I see." Livermore frowned at his cigar end. "What happened?"

"WELL, the sophomores and one or two others tagged after Poole. We had to go too finally and Doc put us through a calesthenic drill. I'd managed to pick up Mallet's notes and I realized someone was telling him what to do. It's that Porter."

"Porter, eh?"

"Yes, sir. It turns out he's an old friend of Mallet's. He tells Mallet just what

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to do each day and Mallet does it. The result is—well, the practice is moving along in a pretty normal fashion. We've tried to ball it up by doing things wrong. Mallet doesn't realize at the time, but after practice I guess Porter tells him. The next day Mallet points out our mistakes."

"In short," said Chuck Hedges, "there's no excuse developing to get rid of him."

"But it can't go on!" Livermore said. "He has no system. No plays to give the squad."

"Porter will provide them," said Harrell. "He was quite a good back some seven or eight years ago. He knows football."

"But that's not the way the proposition was set up," Livermore said. "Mallet was supposed to direct the show himself. That was the bargain."

"You didn't stipulate that he shouldn't hire himself an assistant if he chose," Hedges said.

Mr. Livermore experienced the impatience of a good executive. "Are you boys really trying? It ought to be simple to keep things from functioning."

"The trouble is," said Harrell, "Mallet addresses all his remarks to Poole and his crowd. If we don't follow his instructions, he doesn't pay any attention to us. He goes right on working with Poole and Co. and it—it makes us look bad instead of him."

"What about this Poole?" Livermore asked. "Is he deliberately putting the heat on you?"

"He has one of the football scholarships," said Harrell. "He's working on the side for extra dough. His attitude is strictly commercial."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"A garage mechanic in some hick town," Hedges said. "And a hell of a good back. We need him."

"Does he belong to any campus club?"

"No," Harrell said. "Of course *we* didn't rush him. Not our type. But I understand he turned down bids from some of the smaller outfits. Said he hadn't the time or money for clubs."

A cagey look came into Livermore's eyes. "Time or money, eh? Maybe things could be made easier for Master Poole. What do you think? A job that really paid well. Perhaps we might even take him in here and arrange for his initiation fee and dues somehow? That ought to impress a boy of his type."

"It's worth a try," said Hedges. "If we got him to play ball with us, Mallet would be finished."

"Well," said Livermore, "what are we waiting for? Find him, Harrell. Tell him I want to see him here—tonight."

DUCKY POOLE, in stained flannels and a leather windbreaker, stood in the doorway of Livermore's room. His face was expressionless.

"Come in, my boy, come in!" said Livermore heartily. He was handling this alone. Hedges and Harrell had gone away. "Sit down. I think you'll find this chair the most comfortable. I know you're in training so I won't offer you a drink or a cigar."

"Thanks just the same," said Ducky. He took the leather armchair.

"I suppose you feel quite at home at Bradfield now. Freshman year behind you . . . adjustments made."

Ducky said he felt all right.

"Sure you do," said Livermore. "And Bradfield's expecting great things of you. I'm told you're one of the most promising backs to come here in years."

"I hope I make good," said Ducky. "I like to earn my pay."

Livermore's laugh was a trifle false. "Refreshing point of view," he said. "But we don't talk about it quite so *baldly* as a general rule. It's a perfectly even trade, you know, Poole. You are offered an education, all the advantages of making connections that will stand you in good stead through life. In return you are *privileged* to take part in our community life according to your particular talent—which happens to be football."

"It seems a cut and dried business proposition to me," said Ducky. "Incidentally I understand you're responsible for the payroll. What's in it for you?"

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Livermore looked taken back. "Why—it is a matter of gratitude. I'm grateful for—for everything Bradfield did for me. It—it's a form of recreation."

"Baloney," said Ducky Poole.

"I beg your pardon!"

"Being a philanthropist is Standard Maneuver Number One for every cutthroat businessman. The publicity value is important."

"You're a rather direct young man," said Livermore.

"You don't get time to read fairy stories in a garage," said Ducky.

Livermore swallowed hard. "Since you prefer to be direct, then let us be direct. Why are you and your particular friends on the football squad supporting Professor Mallet?"

"Because he's the head coach," said Ducky.

"You undoubtedly know how Professor Mallet happens to be in that position?"

"I've heard tell," said Ducky.

"You know then that it's quite temporary? That it is, in fact, a sort of gag?"

"I haven't any abdominal pains from laughing," said Ducky Poole. His gray eyes met Livermore's steadily, and they were not friendly.

MR. LIVERMORE became less diplomatic. "In view of what Bradfield has done for you, Poole, I think we might expect your coöperation."

" 'We'?" said Ducky.

"Well—ah—those of us who have Bradfield's interest at heart."

"I am being paid to play football," said Ducky. "Not to take part in practical jokes. Especially unfunny practical jokes."

"Look here, young man, you're being pretty high-handed. Suppose this scholarship of yours was withdrawn?"

Ducky shrugged. "I should feel entitled to an explanation, and I would demand it as publicly as possible. With diagrams!"

Livermore turned away. Dark red was seeping up over the rim of his collar. Somehow he managed to control his voice.

"Let's be reasonable about this," he said.

"Okay with me."

"We've got to get down to the serious business of football, Poole. The State game is less than three weeks away. Mallet's had his fling. We've got to get him out of there."

"When there's a new head coach I'll take orders from him," said Ducky.

"We need your help to bring that about," said Livermore. "Quite frankly, we feel you and your friends should get together with Johnny Harrell and the rest."

"Why don't you fire Mallet if you don't like him?" asked Ducky.

"There was an agreement," said Livermore. "I never dreamed he'd go so far with it. I can't very well fire him until he's failed."

Ducky nodded. "Bad publicity."

"Precisely," Livermore snapped. "Now get this, Poole. I can make it worth your while to coöperate. And I can make it extremely difficult for you if you refuse. For instance, I can see to it that you find work which will be far more remunerative than your present jobs. You might be invited to join Kappa Kappa Kappa."

"I couldn't do that," said Ducky. "I already belong to a club."

"Oh, I was given to understand—"

"This is a new club," said Ducky. "There are so far only two charter members, and we hope to see the membership increase by leaps and bounds." He looked straight at Bradfield's most influential alumnus. "It is called the Livermore-for-Dog-Catcher-Club."

Ducky Poole rose slowly from the leather chair. "When you write your autobiography, Livermore, you'd better say you didn't know it was loaded."

CHAPTER VIII

FLASHLIGHT PRACTICE

BILL PORTER said that if it were not for a high degree of personal modesty he would have to break down and admit that he was a genius.

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"Look at this," he said to Erika. He was sitting at the table in the Mallets' living room, a mass of papers spread out in front of him. Erika leaned over his shoulder to look. He was instantly conscious of her perfume and of her. He tried to shut his mind to the notions this stimulated.

"The two ends go down deep," said Bill, pointing to the diagram with his pencil. "The wing back and the quarterback go out into the flat. If the defense fades to cover the ends, the passer heaves one out into the flat. If they come in, he heaves one deep to the end who isn't covered by the safety man. It's fool-proof."

Erika said it seemed positively brilliant to her.

"This Poole can hit a dime at thirty yards with a football," Bill said. "Best passer I've seen since Sid Luckman."

"This Poole," said Erika, "is my favorite person—as long as he keeps on being on our side."

"So I have a rival!" Bill said. He was laughing, but not with his eyes.

"Why, William, you know that you're the light of my life!"

"That's more like it," said Bill. He looked at his watch. "You'd better tell Avery it's nearly time."

"Poor darling. He hates it so."

"It's the only way for him to learn to spot mistakes himself," said Bill. "There'll be a showdown any time now, Erika, and we've got to be ready to meet it."

Avery was at his desk in the study at the back of the house. He peered up over the green-shaded student lamp as Erika came in.

"It's after nine o'clock, Avery," she said. "If we're going we'd better start."

Avery's face bore an expression of pain. "Darn it, Erika, do we *have* to? I mean, I really . . . well, do *you* think so?"

"You've put yourself in Bill's hands, darling."

"I know it, Erika, but I—uh—am a mass of bruises."

"My poor angel."

Avery sighed. "Very well, I shall be ready in a moment."

Bill had to turn away to hide his face when Avery joined him and Erika in the front hall about ten minutes later. The head of the Landis Foundation wore a pair of football pants, football shoes, and a jersey, heavily padded at the shoulders. He carried a headguard in one hand and a case for his glasses in the other. He looked like a caricature of those gawky kids that Norman Rockwell does so well for the *Post* covers.

Erika saved the day by producing Avery's topcoat. "You'd better take this, darling. You'll be warm when we've finished and it's quite chilly."

Avery covered his shame with the coat and the three of them went out into the night. Erika carried a large electric torch, but she used it sparingly. The moon was bright and she was not interested in attracting attention.

They walked to one of the side entrances to Livermore Stadium. Bill produced a key, unlocked a small door which led to a toolshed. Through this they emerged onto the deserted football field.

"The main thing, Avery," Bill said, "is the way the boys are tackling; especially Harrell and his mob. Tackling has to be clean, hard, and low. It's not some kind of energetic necking party. Let's try it on the dummy again."

IN THE moonlight the tackling dummy, as it swayed to and fro in the breeze, might have been a round, headless figure dangling from a gallows. While Erika held the torch Bill made certain that the catch which released the dummy from its suspending rope when it was properly tackled was in order.

"Okay, Avery," Bill said.

Avery slipped off his coat, placed the glasses in the case, and laid the case on top of the coat. Then rebellion flared. "Look here, you don't have to be an actor to be a critic of acting. I—uh—why don't you demonstrate, Porter?"

"My dear fellow," said Bill patiently, "you've got to get the feel of this. You'll probably have to show the boys how. Now

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run at the thing hard and tackle it low, around the knees."

"Very well," Avery said dispiritedly.

There was a runway of turf leading up to the dummy and the thick carpet beneath it of soft earth and sawdust. Avery paused at the end of the runway and then came loping forward. He was very earnest. He was all elbows and knees. He gave the impression of coat-tails streaming out behind him, except that, of course, he wore no coat.

Erika's torch outlined his ungainly figure as he approached. His mouth was open. His fingers were crooked, clawlike. He hurled himself at the dummy. It was not a good tackle. It was high. The dummy swung upward, but did not come loose from its moorings. Avery clung to it, jarred by the impact.

"No," said Bill. "No, no, Avery! You've got to get it low. A good running back can twist his way out of that kind of tackle. Try it again."

Avery righted himself. His skinny legs seemed to buckle under him for a moment. He was breathing hard.

"Once you've done it right you'll understand," Bill said.

Slowly, shoulders drooping, Avery returned to the end of the runway. He poised himself like a sprinter for the take-off. He came forward into the radius of Erika's torch. Then suddenly the whole place was white with a series of explosions. Avery, blinking, sprawled at the dummy. It had been swinging on its rope and he missed it entirely, landing face down in the sawdust.

"Photographers!" Bill cried angrily.

There were shouts of laughter. People were running. Erika's torch picked up three or four of them. Someone had tipped off the press about these nightly instruction periods.

Bill set out in pursuit. Unwittingly he gave a very fine demonstration of the flying tackle. He dove at one of the escaping figures and nailed him hard. A camera went spilling out over the grass. Bill's fingers locked themselves in hair and the photographer's face beat an unwilling tattoo on the damp earth.

"Uncle!" cried the photographer. He was still laughing.

Bill turned him over and sat on his chest. Erika flashed the torch on his face.

"It's Dobson of the *Express*," Bill said. "What goes on here?"

There were tears of both pain and mirth in Dobson's eyes. "Take it easy, Bill!" he choked. Then he moaned. "Oh Lord, the sight of him, charging that dummy in the dead of night! His face!"

Thoughtfully, Avery bent over and picked up Dobson's camera.

"How did you know we were here?" Bill asked.

"Livermore's been having Mallet watched," Dobson said. "Hoped to get something on him, I guess. But this *is* news, Bill. You've got to admit that."

Bill swore. He used a great many nouns and adjectives that should never have been heard by Erika. "I suppose every rag in the country will be carrying that picture on its sports page tomorrow."

"Tough luck," said Dobson. "But what a wow!"

Avery spoke carefully, as if the choice of words was extremely important. "The—uh—purpose of this intrusion is, I take it, to make me appear ridiculous before the public?"

"Oh Lord," Dobson gasped, and was off in another paroxysm.

Avery glanced at the camera in his hands. "At least this picture need not reach its destination," he said.

"It's no good, Avery. Several of them got away. All the papers will have it."

Avery leaned over Mr. Dobson. He appeared solicitous. "You found this performance amusing?"

"Sorry, old man, I near died laughing," said Dobson.

"I, too, feel in the mood for mirth."

With entirely unexpected violence Avery smashed Mr. Dobson's camera over Mr. Dobson's head. Mr. Dobson, induced to slumber, closed his eyes.

"Avery!" Erika said in a shocked voice.

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Avery looked at Bill, ignoring her. "*You* wouldn't by any chance have staged this thing, Porter?"

"You know better than that," said Bill.

"That is fortunate," said Avery, "because I find myself feeling quite annoyed." He looked down at the recumbent Dobson. "We will let them bury their own dead," he said, without a trace of humor.

WHATEVER George Zimmerman's faults, one statement he had made to Bill and Rafferty was incontrovertible. In these days of terror and bloodshed with the definite stench of low tide hanging about the activities of most men, the newspaper readers of the nation are hungry for the lighter side of life. Thus the popularity of the comics, the success of the humorous columnists, the vast interest in sports of all kinds.

Hundreds of thousands of newspaper readers the next morning found a dish served up that was made to order for satisfying this need. In the center of their sports pages was a large picture bearing the caption:

BRADFIELD COACH PRACTICING WHAT HE PREACHES

The picture would have been hilarious without the accompanying news story. It showed Avery spread-eagled in the sawdust pit, the tackling dummy dancing over his head. The expression on his face was one easily interpreted as stark terror. His eyes were staring, his mouth slack. It was characteristic of many flashlight photographs taken without warning. The undignified position of Bradfield's coach, however, was the finishing touch.

At Bradfield itself someone had seen to it that there was an extra supply of newspapers delivered to the student body. Some of them thought it was pretty funny; some of them were annoyed, realizing that Bradfield as a whole was as much a butt of the joke as Avery. The feeling grew that this farce had gone far enough. After all, Bradfield's prestige was important to all of them.

There were rumblings at chapel that morning. Behind the pulpit Dr. MacKenzie looked worried. He thought it wise to include among the notices a reference to "unfortunate publicity . . . certain everything will straighten itself out in a few days."

Avery was not at chapel, and when Dr. MacKenzie tried to reach him at his house and at the science building he had no luck. Dr. MacKenzie knew he had to act. Even though Avery was fighting an unequal battle and had all of the good doctor's sympathy, part of his, MacKenzie's, job was to control anything that might reflect unfortunately on Bradfield. MacKenzie hoped that Avery hadn't walked out. It would be too bad. Such a brilliant scientist. A thing like this might blight his entire career.

Dr. MacKenzie needn't have worried. Avery had not walked out. Avery was at the Bradfield Inn. He and Erika and Bill sat at a table in the corner of the dining room. They had been served with breakfast, but Avery, except for some weak tea with lemon, left it untouched. His eyes were focused on the main door.

At last the thing he had been waiting for took place. Mr. Horace Livermore, accompanied by Chuck Hedges, appeared. He was halfway across the room before he saw Avery. He stopped, and the corners of his mouth began to twitch. Then he broke into gargantuan laughter.

He came up to Avery's table, wiping his eyes with a white silk handkerchief. "I'm sorry, Mallet. Damned if I'm not. I like a fighter, and you put up a good fight. Better than I expected. You've lost and I hope there won't be any hard feelings."

Avery's face registered no feeling, hard or otherwise. He spoke clearly and in a voice loud enough to be heard by everyone in the dining room.

"Does being photographed in a regrettably comic attitude constitute failure at my job?" he asked.

LIVERMORE stopped laughing and looked suspicious. He glanced at Bill and Erika. He could read nothing there. "It makes it pretty clear publicly that you know nothing about the job you've under-

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taken," he said. "Failure is inevitable."

"As you may know," said Avery, "I am a scientist. In my profession, when we—uh—are faced with a problem, we experiment. Some of those experiments are not successful. But we do not think that we have failed until we have failed."

"You mean you plan going on with this burlesque?" Livermore's voice was hoarse.

"Until I have failed."

"But, great Heaven, man—"

"You have hampered me at—uh—every turn," said Avery. "You set up the—uh—conditions and then tried to make it impossible for me to meet them. You have—uh—sabotaged the whole scheme from the start."

"Hear, hear!" said Bill.

Chuck Hedges broke in, "Do you expect Mr. Livermore to let you make a hodge-podge of things indefinitely? To lose the State game?"

"Losing to State would—uh—perhaps constitute failure. I do not agree that an—uh—undignified photo constitutes any such thing."

"Well, I'm damned," said Livermore.

"If you were to remove me from my post," said Avery, "without any test, I should consider that you had—uh—forfeited your end of the bargain. That you would, in short, be bound to turn over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the Landis Foundation."

That line of turkey red appeared above Livermore's collar. "You can't get away with this, Mallet. I'll—"

"Just a minute, Mr. Livermore," said Chuck Hedges. "There are perhaps twenty boys on the squad who are working in earnest with Mallet. The rest of them, as you know, have been drilling in secret with me."

"You admit that?" asked Avery.

"Certainly I admit it," Hedges snapped. "We couldn't wait for this joke to run its course. We have a football season ahead of us. What I'm getting at, Mr. Livermore, is this. Let Mallet start his ragtailed bunch against State. They'll be wiped off the field in ten minutes and Mallet will have failed. Then we can shoot in the loyal boys that have worked with me and—"

"This reminds me of the Spanish revolution," said Bill. "I could never make out who were the Loyalists and who were the Rebels."

"Keep out of this, Porter," said Livermore.

"Oh quite," said Bill. "Mrs. Mallet and I are just here as witnesses. And to report to the New York *Globe* on the side."

"I offer *you* a proposition, Livermore," said Avery. "I think it is a fair one. Certainly fairer than any you have—uh—put forward. There are certain boys on the squad who have practiced earnestly with me. We have had our difficulties. Harrell and some others have made every effort to ridicule and hinder us. They have worked with Hedges on the side. They have deliberately refused to take instruction."

"Very well. Let us have a showdown. Today is Wednesday. I suggest that on Saturday afternoon we have a trial game at the stadium—my boys against Hedges'. Since Hedges' group contains most of the better players on the squad I think we should have an advantage. I suggest that if Hedges' boys do not defeat mine by more than one—uh—one—uh . . ."

"Touchdown," said Bill urgently.

"By more than one touchdown," said Avery, "that I shall be considered *not* to have failed. That I shall be permitted to continue and that you shall cease to impede my efforts. If my boys lose by *more* than one touchdown, then I shall retire instantly from the—uh—arena."

Livermore was scowling. "There's some trick about this. I—"

"Take him up, Mr. Livermore," Hedges said, chuckling. "It's a very simple way out of our spot. My boys will murder Mallet's. It'll be a track meet."

"Very well," said Livermore. "I accept. The game to be held Saturday afternoon." He turned and went across the dining room to his own table, followed by the grinning Hedges.

Avery sat, looking down at his long slender fingers.

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"You were wonderful, darling," Erika said gently. "Dignified and—and wonderful."

"The only catch," said Bill, "is that you can't win. Hedges has almost every man, with the exception of Poole, who would ordinarily be the varsity team. They worked together most of last year. It's like playing a high school team against Notre Dame."

"Who," Avery asked, "is Notre Dame?"

CHAPTER IX

SALUTE THE HEELS

THE football squad was still indulging in two practice sessions a day since classes were not scheduled until the following Monday. The morning session at ten o'clock was usually begun without formality, the players taking to the field for a warming-up period before they were called together by the coach for organized practice.

But, on this Wednesday morning, no players took the field. There was considerable merriment in the locker room as they got into their playing togs. The story had already gone the rounds. Chuck Hedges had managed that.

Johnny Harrell, Bugs Murphy, and the rest of the Kappa crowd were in high spirits. The war of nerves was at an end. They would now drill openly with Chuck Hedges, and if there were some who were willing to side with Mallet and attempt to go through with this cockeyed bargain, that was their funeral. But first they would have to get their instructions from Mallet.

"He won't get eleven guys to stick with him," Harrell predicted, "let alone enough to play through a practice game."

There was one conspicuous absentee as the boys dressed. Ducky Poole had not put in an appearance, and the sophomores were silent and worried in their corner of the locker room. What was there for them to do if Ducky had given up the fight?

At that moment Ducky Poole was sitting in a one-arm lunch in the village. His eyes remained fixed on a large glass of milk for which he seemed to have no appetite. Part of the reason for this was that Rafferty, in the next chair, was elaborately spiking a cup of coffee with rye whisky.

Rafferty said that for the first time in his life he was ashamed of the profession of news photographer.

"It was a lousy trick," said Ducky Poole.

Rafferty said it certainly was. He said that in all his years with the *Globe* he had never been doublecrossed by his pals before. He said if pictures were to be taken he should have been in on it. He said it would probably cost him his job.

Ducky's eyes narrowed. "You mean you would have ganged up on Mallet even if you'd known what was coming off?"

Rafferty said why not since the *Globe* would get the pictures anyway from some photographic service.

Ducky raised his right arm in a stiff salute. "*Heil*, heel!" he said.

Rafferty said he was pained. He said after all it was all very well to champion a cause as long as it had a chance of success. He said that, however, Avery had come to the end of his rope and this was the point beyond which it was no use batting your head against a stone wall.

"What about Livermore?" Ducky said.

Rafferty said that Livermore was a this and a that, doubled and trebled, but that he held all the cards.

Ducky looked deep in thought. Then he said, "Do you really know anything about photography?"

Rafferty said he would send his seconds around in the morning. "Zat is zee eensult!" Rafferty said. After spending the best years of his life in a darkroom!

Ducky said he imagined Rafferty was at his very best in a dark room, provided he had the proper company. He wondered how Livermore would behave in a dark room.

"I don't follow you," Rafferty said. "Not that it matters after being slurred here and slurred there."

"Don't give up the ship," said Ducky. He sounded cheered. "And don't mislay your camera."

Rafferty said he had never mislaid his

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camera and that if it could only cook all his problems would be solved.

VOICES died away and there was a sudden hush as the door at the end of the locker room opened and closed behind Avery. He was wearing his garden pants and a blue flannel shirt. He stood looking around at the boys for a moment.

Superficial observers like Johnny Harrell and Bugs Murphy probably did not notice a slight change in Avery: the angular line of his jaw, the set of his shoulders.

"I see," said Avery, "that you have already heard the news I—uh—came here to tell you."

Somebody tittered.

"I have made a bargain with Mr. Livermore and Mr. Hedges. But the—uh—fact is, I have no idea whether I can carry out that bargain or not. This is a personal—uh—disagreement between Mr. Livermore and me. There is no real reason why any of you should become involved in it if you do not choose to do so."

Silence.

"I have been working under great difficulties with you. Partly because of my own—uh—unfamiliarity with the job and partly because of a lack of—uh—cooperation. To a great number of you it has all seemed like a great joke. I can—uh—assure you that it is no joke to me."

"Not after this morning's paper, I'll bet," said Bugs Murphy. There was a mild reaction to this crack, but not as great as Bugs felt it deserved. He looked aggrieved.

"Under the terms of this agreement," said Avery, "those of you who prefer to join forces with Mr. Livermore and Mr. Hedges may consider yourselves free of any obligation to me. Mr. Hedges is going to conduct practice on the freshman athletic field. If there are any of you who still care to stick with me, you will—uh—remain here."

He paused. In the faces around him he saw no encouragement. "Whatever you choose now, I wish to say to those of you who have made the effort to work with me, I am grateful. Very grateful indeed. If you feel that you have gone the limit in this affair, I shall not blame you or hold it against you." He drew a deep breath. "That is all, gentlemen. Mr. Hedges is waiting."

Instantly Johnny Harrell picked up his headguard and started for the door, followed by Murphy and the rest of the Kappas. One or two of the in-betweens looked hesitantly at Avery and then trailed after Harrell and Murphy. There was a stir among the sophomores. One of the boys spoke up: Philbin, a promising end.

"Gee, Mr. Mallet, we're in kind of a spot," he said.

"I know it, Philbin," said Avery. Then he added wistfully, "I, too, am in a spot. Poole isn't here?"

"No, sir." Philbin shuffled his cleated shoes on the cement floor. "You see, most of us came here to play football, sir. I'm not slamming you. You've done your best in a lousy situation. We—we've all been for you, sir."

"Thank you, Philbin."

"But if we stick now, sir, in a cause that simply has no chance, Hedges will give us the bum's rush. We wouldn't be eligible to play at any other college after a year on the freshman team here. We—we'll be through with football."

"I understand, Philbin." Avery's voice was quite natural.

"So, sir, you see how we're fixed."

"I see, Philbin. And perhaps it's the simplest solution. There are sixteen of you still here. If enough of you decided to go with Mr. Hedges, we would be unable to put a team in the field on Saturday. That would settle the whole thing—uh—out of court, as it were."

Philbin was obviously miserable. "You see how it is, sir."

"Quite. And I don't blame you. Not for an instant."

PHILBIN took up his headguard and moved reluctantly toward the door. Avery turned away. He did not want to watch this exodus.

"Where the hell do you lugs think you're going?"

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Avery swung about. He felt a sudden pounding against his ribs. Ducky Poole was barring Philbin's way.

"Gee, Ducky, we thought you'd quit!" Philbin said. "You weren't here and—"

"Have you heard that Mr. Mallet's been removed as head coach?" Ducky asked coldly.

"Not exactly, Ducky, but—"

"Do you think we've got any chance to beat those bums?" Ducky cut in.

"Well, gee, Ducky, you know how it is. They've got—"

"Running out of guts?" Ducky demanded.

"Well, no, but—"

"Then that's that," said Ducky Poole. He looked at Avery. "Sorry to be late, Coach, but I got tied up downtown."

"That's—that's all right, Poole," Avery said unsteadily and walked away quickly.

Philbin and the rest trooped out onto the field.

In the entrance hall Avery almost stumbled over Doc Meade. The Doc was sitting in his favorite leather chair. He surveyed Avery mournfully.

"It would of been better if you'd of let me," he said.

"Let you what?" Avery asked.

"The thing about a broken leg," said Doc.

Avery said, "Hedges will be needing you, Doctor Meade. The boys have already joined him on Freshman Field."

Doc shook his head. "I'm a sucker. I've always been a sucker. Once I put the slug on a heavyweight prizefighter for twistin' a kid's arm. I lost six teeth that time. I'm soft as mush. Here I am tossing away a job I've had for twenty years just on account of it."

"On account of what, Doctor Meade?"

"On account of you're the screwiest, dumbest, don't-know-when-you're-lickedest dope I ever knew," said Doc. Then his jaw stuck out. "We'll have a good tough team in there Saturday if I have to wire 'em together."

Avery cleared his throat. "Thank you, Doctor. I—I find it extremely difficult to —uh—express myself on the—uh—subject of loyalty. I—uh—find myself deeply moved. I—"

"Loyalty, my foot," said Doc, angrily. "It's just on account of I'm soft. Soft as mush."

CHAPTER X

GREAT DAY FOR SLAUGHTER

ON FRIDAY Raphael Jones, rated among New York's leading sports-writers, devoted his entire column to Bradfield. This is what he wrote:

> One of the most unusual football games ever to be played in this country will take place in Livermore Stadium at Bradfield College tomorrow afternoon. The sports pages have been full of the story of young Mr. Mallet, the science professor who took over the coaching assignment at Bradfield in order to earn a donation for his scientific foundation. The story has not lacked its amusing angles, but your reporter has had the uncomfortable feeling all along that it didn't smell good.
>
> Mr. Mallet, who knew nothing of football and was driven to gain experience in the dead of night under the beam of a flashlight held by his loyal wife, has been in charge of the squad now for more than ten days. Mr. Mallet was expected to throw in the towel long before this.
>
> His failure to do so has forced Mr. Horace Livermore, angel of Bradfield football, to demand a showdown. That showdown will occur tomorrow when Mr. Mallet pits seventeen of Bradfield's secondary players against what amounts to last year's varsity team under the expert direction of Chuck Hedges. It has all the elements of equality involved in turning a batch of Christian slaves loose in an arena with a pack of hungry lions.
>
> This unusual game will be witnessed by Bradfield's student body, whose sympathies by and large seem to lie with the lions, and by a large section of the working press including yours truly.
>
> Mr. Mallet and his gallant little army of irregulars are due to have the daylights beaten out of them. Possibly that is as it should be. Mr. Mallet is not a football coach and no doubt should never have gotten himself in such a spot.
>
> This observer, however, perhaps as a result of Hollywood training, will be secretly rooting for a twist in the script.

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Since there are no marines to arrive in the nick of time, we can only hope the Christian slaves turn on the hungry lions and tear them limb from limb. It is probably an idle dream, but a pleasant one.

THERE was a much larger crowd for the game than anyone expected. People turned up from miles around. Naturally no tickets had been printed so they were admitted to the stadium free. A few minutes before game time there must have been nearly fifteen thousand, eager to watch the slaughter of the innocents.

Ensconced on the fifty-yard line and surrounded by the greater portion of the student body were Mr. Horace Livermore and a party of friends.

The press, located in their special box along the rim of the stadium, were out in full force, first-string reporters covering as if it were one of the climax games of the season. Chuck Hedges had given interviews freely.

"Except for Kane at right guard and Tichenor at right end, this is last year's varsity," he told them. "We have last year's smooth-working backfield of Johnny Harrell, Devens, Clark, and Murphy. Of course, there'll be some rough edges. We haven't had too much time to work together. But I think you can safely say that you are getting a preview of the team which will face State a week from today."

"What about Mallet's crew?" he was asked.

Hedges laughed indulgently. "They have one really good back—chap named Poole. There it is. A few green sophomores. One or two members of last year's junior varsity on whom we were not counting in any event.

"Then it's a pushover, Chuck?"

"Between you and me," said Chuck, "I don't believe this game will ever run its full course. A period, maybe two, and there'll be no purpose in carrying on."

In the Field House Avery refused to see the press. He sat in the head coach's office; he was pale and haggard. He kept clenching and unclenching his hands. Erika and Bill were with him. His players were in the locker room where Ducky Poole and Doc Meade were giving a final mental and physical going-over.

"I guess I must have been out of my mind," Avery said. "I've—uh—played a dirty trick on these kids. I should have let them go. There's no reason to—uh—subject them to this."

"If you've done nothing else, Avery," Erika said, "you've taught them something about loyalty and team spirit. It seems to me I recall hearing that was a pretty important part of all college athletics."

Avery shook his head. "It's just because they're sorry for me," he said. "It doesn't make any sense."

"Maybe it's more than that," said Bill. "Maybe they don't like the totalitarian idea on a football team. Don't think for a minute they're not anxious to win."

"That's the trouble," said Avery. "They want to win. If they had a chance—"

"We've given them a set of good sound plays," said Bill. "Nothing fancy, but quite workable."

Avery's gloom did not lift at all. "Look at them. Poole can take it. He's tough and —uh—cantankerous. Philbin is a fine boy and you say he's a good end. But the rest! Barrett playing guard and weighing one hundred and sixty pounds. Corcoran at quarterback weighing about one hundred and fifty. It's murder, Porter, and we've no right to ask them to—"

"They decided for themselves," said Erika.

"I know. But we—we appealed to their —uh—sentimental side." Avery stood up. "I'm going to tell them. I'm going to tell them it's all off."

"Avery, wait!"

But Avery would not wait. He went out of the office and down the short flight of stairs to the locker room. The pathetically small squad was grouped around Ducky Poole, who was talking earnestly. He stopped as Avery appeared. Then:

"Any last-minute instructions, Coach?"

Avery squared his shoulders. "I have come to tell you that I—uh—can't ask you to go through with this," he said. "I want

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to thank you. I want somehow to—uh—tell you how deeply I appreciate your spirit. But I can't ask you to go ahead. You'll be—uh—pushed around and laughed at, simply because I—uh—got out over my depth. We won't go through with it."

Ducky gave him a blank look. After a pause he said, "It's a great day for it. Not too hot."

Doc Meade said, "How does that tape feel on your ankle, Pee Wee? It don't bind you none, does it?"

Pee Wee Corcoran, the pint-sized quarterback, said it felt elegant.

Ducky nodded at the clock on the locker room wall. "We'd better get rolling. Game's due to start in ten minutes."

CHAPTER XI

SO THEY GOT ROLLING

RAPHAEL JONES leaned back in his seat in the press box, his hat tilted forward over his eyes to shade them from the sun. This was not, he thought, an afternoon he would remember with pleasure. In spite of his feeling that Mallet had gotten a raw deal, it was a private feud and it should have stayed private.

"The skeleton in Bradfield's closet—and look at the mob that's come to help rattle the bones!"

He watched the two teams warming up on the turf below him. Hedges' boys, though technically the outsiders, wore the white jerseys with big red numerals affected by Bradfield's varsity. Avery's little band of loyalists wore the blue jerseys of the scrubs.

Pathetic heroes, they were.

Jones sighed as Ducky Poole and Johnny Harrell met in the center of the field for the toss of the coin. This was going to be like shooting fish in a barrel. A well known official was refereeing as a means of getting in shape for the approaching season. The whole affair had the atmosphere of a regular game, even down to the crowd in the stands. It would not, thought Raphael Jones, retain that complexion long after the first whistle blew.

Johnny Harrell had won the toss and the Hedges elected to receive the kickoff. The object was clearly to get possession of the ball as quickly as possible and steamroller the Mallets.

The ball was set up. The Hedges, competent-looking and large, took their positions. The Mallets, looking like a high-school squad, spread out across the field to go down under Ducky Poole's kick.

Raphael Jones closed his eyes. "Tell me when it's over," he said audibly.

An eager voice spoke at his elbow. "Mr. Jones. I'm Pettibone of the *Mail*. I—I'm not a sports expert like you, but it *does* look rather unequal, doesn't it?"

Rather unequal—

Raphael Jones snorted. He was about to make a reply when the referee's whistle shrilled. Ducky Poole moved forward, his toe met the ball and sent it sailing deep into Hedges' territory. Johnny Harrell, relaxed and easy, waited on his own goal line. His interference formed in front of him.

Down the field sped Midge Barrett, the Mallets watchcharm guard. Master Barrett might not have the beef to halt a machine assault in the line, but he had the speed of a whippet chasing a mechanical rabbit.

"Nice going," said Raphael Jones to nobody in particular.

Devens, the Hedges right half, threw a half-hearted block at Midge, much as he might have brushed at an annoying mosquito. Midge bounded off him like a rubber ball and dove, low and hard, at Harrell, who was just getting under way. Captain Harrell's nose dug a furrow in the turf just short of his own twenty-yard line.

Raphael Jones brightened. "That noise you heard," he said to Pettibone, "was teeth rattling. A nice tackle."

The Hedges huddled. They came out of it with clockwork precision . . . a shift . . . a spinning back . . . and Harrell was knifing off tackle. The Mallets underweight line immediately emulated moles digging for safety.

Swede Larson, the massive tackle whose job was to open a hole on the play, found a lot of people underfoot. In fact he found

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his own feet no longer making contact with the ground which is no position to be in when you are supposed to be opening a hole. Harrell, his way blocked, cut out to the right. There he was met by Master Philbin, a pretty fair end. Harrell picked himself up a yard back of his original starting point.

The Bradfield captain was annoyed. Raphael Jones saw his head bob angrily as he expressed his opinion of the situation to Larson. The Hedges went into a huddle again.

"I can see that guy's mind work," said Raphael Jones. "No use sticking to orthodox football against these clucks. Two to one he tries to pass."

Mr. Jones qualified as a mind reader thirty seconds later. Harrell faded. Evans and Tichenor, his ends, raced downfield. Harrell stood poised, his arm cocked, a statuesque figure of a young American athlete. Dixie Doolin, the Mallets pigmy center, was not impressed. Perhaps he had wriggled his way between the legs of the varsity's stalwart center trio. In any event, he was suddenly swarming all over Mr. Harrell.

Unprepared for this junior tornado, the statuesque figure of a young American athlete hit the turf with a thud, a scant five yards in front of his own goal line. Across the field Chuck Hedges was on his feet. Chuck Hedges' language could not be heard in the press box. It was a pity.

THE Hedges lined up in kick formation with Harrell standing in his own end zone. He got off a beautiful kick which carried just past midfield. Pee Wee Corcoran waited for it. Eaves and Tichenor bore down on him like an infuriated Panzer division.

Pee Wee caught the ball, took three steps forward, and stopped dead. The charging ends converged—on each other. Pee Wee streaked for the sidelines. For one breathtaking second, in which Raphael Jones' hat moved from front to back, it looked as though Pee Wee was away. But Bugs Murphy came up out of nowhere and smashed him out of bounds. Raphael waited, anxiously, to see whether Pee Wee would get up. Pee Wee got up, full of bounce. His voice rose in an unearthly shriek.

"Come on, you cockeyed bunch of bums, let's go!"

The Mallets put their heads together. They straggled to their positions on the line. The white-shirted varsity towered over them. Ducky Poole was the tail back. The ball went to him. Pee Wee Corcoran spun like a dervish and ran out to the left. But Ducky plowed off tackle. Two yards.

They went into the same huddle. They ran the same play. Big Swede Larson took care of Ducky after a yard and a half. Eaves, the end, took care of Pee Wee Corcoran, the alleged decoy.

They tried it a third time. Raphael Jones shook his head. Power plays against those mammoth linesmen were futile. The deception created by Pee Wee wouldn't have fooled his grandmother. Ducky Poole was smothered. The Mallets had to kick. This was very expertly accomplished by Ducky, who angled his punt out of bounds on the five-yard line, putting the Hedges in a hole again.

The Hedges didn't believe it. In a varsity game they would have kicked on first down. Now they tried to bull their way out of danger. Bugs Murphy was the battering ram. And he battered. He hit that midget line, was checked fractionally, and then burst through like a projectile from a French .75. He was met head on by Ducky Poole after a four-yard gain.

"Ouch!" said Raphael Jones, in the press box.

Once more Bugs carried the mail for four yards, stopped by Ducky. However, the steam roller was advancing. On the next play, which would certainly have stretched to a first down if properly executed, Bugs imitated W. C. Fields juggling a couple of billiard balls. He recovered the fumble, but lost two of the eight yards he had gained. Harrell kicked; another long, high spiral. Pee Wee snagged it on his own forty-yard line and was promptly tossed

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in his tracks by Messrs. Eaves and Tichenor.

He got up, apparently unharmed.

The Mallets called their signals. Pee Wee spun, Ducky smashed off tackle. The play was thrown for a loss. They tried it again. The white jerseys crushed Ducky to earth for another loss.

"Looks like they only have one play," said Raphael Jones.

They ran it a third time. With whoops of joy, the Hedges powdered Ducky Poole. Even Eaves, who had discovered it was futile fooling around with Pee Wee Corcoran, the inept decoy, hurled himself into the pile-up which was doing quite a job on Ducky Poole at the bottom of it.

But Mr. Eaves and the others had made an unfortunate error. For this time Pee Wee Corcoran wasn't decoying. He had the ball. Much too late the Hedges saw him skipping over the goal line with it tucked under his arm.

Ducky Poole, after wiping the dirt from his eyes, kicked the extra point.

NOW the best of quarterbacks have bad days. Master Johnny Harrell proceeded to have one for the balance of that half. He forgot everything he should have remembered in an effort to erase that score and pile up one of his own.

It was clear to everyone who watched that the Mallets undersized line, though game, could not have withstood a continuous pounding. But so anxious was Harrell to score that he couldn't wait for the slow and sure method to bear fruit.

He threw passes. Harrell was an excellent passer, but if the Mallets had anything it was speed. Corcoran, Poole, Tripler, James, and even little Barrett, the watchcharm guard, covered those passes like a tent. They outran the varsity receivers. They leaped to incredible heights in the air to bat down Harrell's heaves.

Eventually, as it always does, time ran out. The half was over. The underdogs were leading 7-0. This, Raphael Jones knew, would be quickly altered in the next half. Hedges who had been bouncing up and down on the bench like the lid on a boiling tea kettle, would correct his quarterback's faulty strategy.

"It's really remarkable," said Pettibone of the *Mail*. "I understand that the man who supplied the plays for the Mallet team is one of our profession—Bill Porter of the *Globe*."

Raphael Jones sat bolt upright and slapped his thigh. "I should have known it! Someone besides this Mallet had to have a hand in that very smart but quite orthodox football. So it's Bill Porter. Think I'll run him down and get the real dope."

"May I come too?" asked Mr. Pettibone timidly.

"It's a free country," said Raphael Jones.

AVERY, dazed and with a fixed smile on his pale face, was in the locker room, surrounded by his happy charges. Everyone talked at once. Everyone was bruised, battered, and entirely happy. They congratulated Avery. They congratulated each other.

The door at the end of the locker room opened. Bill Porter came in, tailed by a group of writers and spectators, among them Raphael Jones.

"Great work, Bill," Jones said. "Is it legal if Livermore finds out you're the power behind the throne?"

"There was nothing said about hiring assistants," Bill said.

"I figured those boys knew too much to have got all their coaching from an amateur. It rather changes the story from a news point of view."

"What difference does it make so long as Livermore and Hedges get it in the neck?" Bill said. "Pardon me, boys, I've got to see a man about a dog." He darted away and along the corridor toward the head coach's office.

The coach was left behind.

Avery stood quite still for a moment. That conversation had jarred him. After all, it was true. He really hadn't done the job—this magnificent job for which these boys were congratulating him.

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Quietly he turned and walked along the corridor after Bill.

Erika was in the office. Her cheeks were bright, her eyes were bright.

"Bill, it's simply too wonderful!" she cried, as Bill burst in.

"We've done it," Bill chortled. "I knew that old K-79 out of Lou Little's book would fool 'em. It's so old these kids never heard of it."

"If you could have seen Livermore's face!" Erika said. "I was sitting right near him. Red sails in the sunset!"

"Lady, I'm proud of us!" Bill said. And then he proceeded to put his arms around Erika and kiss her very soundly on the lips.

"Pardon me," said an odd, tight voice.

Erika freed herself from Bill's embrace. "Avery!"

Avery's face was the color of ashes. "You're right," he said. "You two have done all this—not me. My part has been that of a—uh—Charles McCarthy. I—uh—seem to have overlooked several angles. I wish you luck with the rest of it."

The door closed.

"Avery!" Erika called. "Darn you, Bill. You would have to try some sort of horse-play at the wrong time. Now he thinks that you and I—that we . . ."

"Don't be crazy," Bill said.

"Did you see his face?"

"I'm sorry," Bill said. "But we *did* do it."

"You dope!" Erika said. "Do you think those kids would have gone out there and fought for you the way they did? That was for Avery."

She was at the door. "Avery!"

Bill was at the window. "There he goes," he said, "making tracks for town."

Erika went to the window, threw it open. "Avery!" she cried.

Avery's long legs had carried him out of earshot.

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The Dragon Blood of Mark Hao

Tomelli stood poised. "I gave you three days, China Boy. You had your chance"

Only the greatest warrior-heroes are given the Weapon of Valor—but even the humblest laundryman in Frisco's Chinatown would lay down his life to defend it. One of them very nearly did

By WALTER G. BROWN
Author of "Black Candles," "The Higher They Fly," etc.

NO DOUBT Sergeant O'Hara of the Chinatown Squad is quite satisfied that he knows exactly what happened outside No. 14 Peking Court on that murky night. According to the record, Big Jim and Tom-Lee had a quarrel, as partners in crime often do, and proceeded to wipe each other out in a very interesting double homicide.

Perhaps Sergeant O'Hara was a bit puzzled by the five broken bones in Big Jim's right hand, and the peculiar shape of the fracture on Tom-Lee's temple—an odd triangular mark. However, the report from the police laboratory assured him that the bullets in Big Jim's body were from Tom-Lee's gun, so the Sergeant called it good riddance and marked the case closed.

In all this, however, was no mention of Mark Hao—a serious omission, since the Chinese's story would have ripped the whole page right out of the police blotter. Which is merely another proof that a great many things happen in Chinatown about

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which the Blue Coat Men know nothing.

This Tom-Lee wasn't a yellow man at all—that was only the Chinese version of his real name, Tomelli. He was a swarthy-faced giant, so utterly ruthless and brutal that the slant-eyed Sons of Han hated him, feared him—and obeyed him. All except this Mark Hao . . .

When the first whisper of Mark Hao's daring defiance of Tom-Lee's power ran through the crooked streets, Chinatown held its breath and waited for the inevitable.

"Ai-yee!" they breathed. "Does the rabbit stand up before the tiger? Mark Hao will have need of a coffin before the moon is round and full again."

On the surface it seemed a totally unequal match, Mark Hao being a small and mild-mannered laundryman with no skill whatever in the use of fist, knife or gun, while the mysterious and powerful Tom-Lee held all Chinatown in his evil grasp.

But Tom-Lee left one factor out of his accounting—the pride of the Chinese Long Swords, an ancient pride so potent that even a rabbit might rise up to challenge its destiny. And Tomelli met his death because of a certain heroic deed which had taken place almost ten thousand miles away.

"Dilli dur ast," they say in the East: "It is a far cry to Delhi," and it is a long way indeed from the sinister quadrangle of Peking Court in Chinatown to far-off Chungking, where the Fighting Dragon bares its fangs at the brown hordes of the Rising Sun.

The connecting link between these two points was Mark Hao's only son, Chan, who had been given his father's life savings to make the long voyage by land and sea from Chinatown to the Chinese battle-lines, and had quickly risen to be flight lieutenant in Chiang Kai-shek's air force.

And so it happened one morning, returning to his base from a solo reconnaissance flight, that young Lieutenant Hao observed a frantic scurrying about on the landing-field below him.

Planes had been drawn up in orderly rows outside their hangars, pending a visit of inspection by one of Marshal Chiang's generals, and now a great silver-winged Japanese bomber was bearing down upon them from the purple hills, escorted by a buzzing swarm of fighter craft.

Lieutenant Hao did not hesitate, for he knew that these planes were more precious to China's cause than twice their weight of *fei-tsui* jade. So, instead of landing, he banked off in his single-seater, climbing high against the rising sun to shield his movements from the enemy.

The great bomber zoomed onward, intent on quick destruction of the rich and helpless booty spread out below. Then young Hao circled and swooped down upon the big bomber, driving swift and true as a stroke of silver lightning.

The two ships crashed together in mid-air, fused into one flaming tangle of wreckage and plummeted to earth, leaving a long plume of black smoke. A tremendous detonation shook the earth as they struck, flinging up broken fragments of men and metal from a yawning crater which only the moment before had been an orderly rice *padi.*

AND because of Hao Chan's heroic suicide in that far-distant China field, Tom-Lee's reign of terror was destined to end in the blue fog of Peking Court, ten thousand miles away.

An official letter and a long, narrow box were shipped to Mark Hao from distant Chungking—borne down the long Burma Road by motor caravan—borne across the long Pacific rollers from Singapore to the Golden Gate.

The letter, written in classic mandarin on finest rice paper, told of Lieutenant Hao's death, and bore the personal seal of the great Marshal Chiang. The long, narrow box contained a ceremonial sword—a magnificently decorated weapon wrapped in folds of lustrous red Shantung silk.

"My son—my only son!" Mark Hao groaned, then he forced his hands to cease their trembling and wiped the twisted seams of agonized grief from his face.

"I am proud on this day of ten thou-

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sand sorrows!" he whispered fiercely. "My honorable ancestors will give Hao Chan loud and joyful welcome into the Shadow-World, for he is now a Son of the Long Sword."

Mark Hao laid the precious Weapon of Valor upon his private shrine with reverence, for in all Chinatown only one other household could boast of Long Sword rank—that of wealthy old Lee Shu the banker, whose ancestors had been mandarins of the white-button and scholars of the yellow-silk.

And every night, when Mark Hao had locked the door of his shop, he would retire to his private quarters, don the white robe of mourning and bow his head to the floor, burning red paper prayers before the gilded figure of Kwan-Yin the Merciful.

Later, he might grasp the Long Sword in his hand and swing it this way and that, faster and faster, until the finely tempered blade made a swishing hum in the air.

"Hai!" Mark Hao would breathe softly, unaware of the proud sparkle which had crept into his slanted black eyes as the song of the sword stirred the dragon-blood in his veins.

Came then a certain night of fog and misty rain, when Mark Hao had completed his prayers and was sitting in cross-legged meditation. Suddenly, from the distance, came the sound of pistol shots, followed by the shrilling of police whistles.

But such affairs were of no consequence to Mark Hao, who was a man of peace and kept the Rice Face Law. However, a few minutes later he became aware of a peculiar sound at his side door, which opened upon a dark and crooked alley leading to Peking Court.

He listened attentively.

The sound was more like a furtive scratching at the door than an honest knock, and when it was repeated, Mark Hao rose stealthily and glided forward on felt-soled slippers. He placed his ear against the wooden panels, but could hear nothing outside. Then something struck against the door with a soft, sliding thud, and there was silence.

WITH great caution Mark Hao opened the door and peered out. At first he could see nothing but the pall of smoky blue mist, then a dark shadow huddled on the step lifted a ghastly white face in the narrow shaft of yellow light which streamed from the room.

"What wan'chee?" Mark demanded, startled by the ghostly apparition.

The man groaned and tried to crawl across the threshold on hands and knees. Mark Hao drew back hastily, his breath catching in a sharp hiss at sight of a wide, dark red stain on the man's shirt.

"You hurt!" Mark exclaimed.

"Knife!" the wounded man gasped. "Help me! Shut . . . door! Cops—" The wounded man collapsed at the Chinaman's feet with a sudden cough—a wet, bubbling cough—and flattened out into oblivion.

"Ai-yee!" Mark breathed, staring down at him through slitted lids. If this unknown Rice Face should die here, there would be Number One trouble with the Blue Coat Men. His best plan would be to bind up the White Devil's wounds and send him forth again under cover of the shrouding fog—

Hastily Mark Hao shut the door—bolted it. Then he knelt down and opened the man's shirt, bathed the long gash between his ribs and began to contrive a rough bandage. The man's eyelids flickered open at the sting of cold water.

"Thanks, Chink!" he gasped. "You're a good guy!"

"You go 'way now, yiss?" Mark queried anxiously. "Blue Coat come here, make plenty trouble for me. No like!"

"Sure—sure, Chink—I'll blow in a minute," the man replied, but when he stood up his hands groped out like a blind man's, and he toppled with a heavy thud.

"Can't make it, Chink," he said, panting. "I'll be all right—just gimme a little time to rest up."

Then came a brisk and authoritative pounding on the front door, followed by an impatient rattling of the knob. "Hey—open up!" a Rice Face voice commanded.

"The cops!" Mark Hao's unbidden guest

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suddenly held a gun in his hand—a dark blue, snub-nosed automatic. He pulled himself into a defensive crouch and the breath whistled in his throat as he snapped a bullet into place—

"No shoot gun!" the Chinaman hissed out sharply. "You safe. I hide you. I tell poh-liss nobody here. They go 'way."

Whereupon Mark caught his White Devil guest under the armpits and helped him crawl into the empty space behind the black silk curtain of his prayer-shrine.

"No tricks now, Chink!" the man snarled, jabbing him in the stomach with the hard steel muzzle. "You make one move to turn me in to the coppers and I'll blast yuh full of holes!"

"Make silent!" Mark hissed, dropping the curtain into place. The knocking being continued with redoubled impatience, he padded on through the darkened shop, pulling on the overhead light as he went.

SERGEANT O'HARA and a uniformed policeman were standing outside, the latter with his service .38 drawn and ready.

"Did you hear anybody running through this alley?" O'Hara demanded. "There's been a fight over in Paradise Court—a Chink shot dead—and the guy got away. A white man—wounded."

"I hear nothing!" Mark Hao answered stolidly.

"Well, we'll look around anyway," O'Hara declared. His quick glance whipped over the bare little shop, and he stirred a heap of laundry bags lying under the broad counter with his foot. Mark Hao held his breath as they went on into the back room.

Incense still smoldered before the shrine, and the square of red Shantung silk was spread out on the floor, holding the broad-bladed Long Sword and a number of papers covered with vertical columns of "broken stick" writing—the letters Hao Chan had written his father from the battle zone.

"What goes on here?" O'Hara asked, eyeing the display.

"I make prayers, Sah-jin, for my son who die in China war," Mark replied in his labored English.

O'Hara glanced curiously at his white robe and embroidered skullcap and nodded.

"Okay. Sorry, if we disturbed you," he said briefly but kindly, and beckoned to the policeman to depart. Mark heard him say, "Well, the guy can't be far away—not with a knife between his ribs . . . One of Tomelli's boys, probably—"

Mark Hao drew a deep breath when he heard the shop door close behind them. Now he could move from the spot where he had been standing so stiffly—covering certain drops of fresh blood which had escaped his previous attention.

"Listen, Chink!" the wounded man spoke through clenched teeth. "You gotta go and get help. I can't walk—I'm still bleedin'. . . . Go on over to 14 Peking Court and tell 'em what happened—tell 'em Nick sent you—"

So Mark put on his round black hat and glided through the crooked alley to Peking Court, groping his way through the ghostly blue haze in search of No. 14. He stared up at the house with uneasy hesitation—its dark windows like blind eyes, its broken steps leading to a door waiting in sinister silence.

If the wounded Nick was one of Tomelli's men, as Sergeant O'Hara had said, then this must be the secret *yamen* of Tom-Lee—the hidden headquarters from which he ruled his little empire of fantan and opium and Chinese lotteries. Mark Hao had never actually seen Tom-Lee, and had no desire to. But he had heard tales—

AT HIS hesitant knock on the door, a little panel in the upper part slid back, the beam of a flashlight dazzled his eyes, and a rough Chinese voice demanded, "What name you? What you want?"

"I am Mark Hao of Pagoda Street. Nick send me here for help—"

"Wait!" the voice commanded, when Mark had finished his whispered account. In less than a minute the door opened and two sturdy figures slipped out and sandwiched him between their hulking shadows.

"Okay, Chink, show us the way," one said.

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On their arrival at the shop, Mark Hao carefully drew the blinds before risking a light. The two White Devils from 14 Peking Court were tall, hard-faced men with unshaven jowls and quick, restless eyes.

"Hurt bad, Nick?" they asked, bending over the wounded man.

"Naw—but I'm bleedin' like a stuck pig," Nick replied. "That Chun Fong was plenty quick with his knife. . . . I got his brother, though, right smack between the eyes!"

"We'll take care of Chun Fong!" one promised grimly. "Wait till Tomelli hears about—"

"Nix—nix!" the other broke in, jerking a warning thumb to indicate Mark Hao's presence.

The first speaker swung around. "Listen, Chink, you keep your mouth buttoned up tight. You ain't seen nothin' and you ain't heard nothin'—savvy?"

"Lay off, Mike!" Nick interrupted. "The Chink is okay . . . All right, boys, let's get goin' while the fog is still thick."

With the help of his two friends, Nick managed to hobble toward the door. He turned his head and grinned back at Mark Hao. "So long, Chink. You won't lose nothin' by helpin' me out. Tomelli'll drop in on you one of these days and fix you up."

Mark Hao stood in the doorway, staring into the smoky mist which swallowed up their figures within ten paces. He wanted no further dealings whatever with these White Devils from Peking Court. Tom-Lee's men—men of violence—of evil ways.

When the door was shut and bolted again, Mark exploded strings of firecrackers in his private quarters, to chase away any evil spirits which the White Devils might have left behind.

IN THE morning a murmur spread through the streets of the Yellow Quarter—Chun Fong was dead, Chun Fong whose brother had died by Nick's blazing gun in the Paradise Court affair. They had found him behind a step in Half Moon Street at dawn, his skull crushed.

The Blue Coat Men went here and there, asking their questions, but the slant-eyed Sons of Han had no need of questions. The Brothers Chun had been managers of a Chinese lottery, and the lottery was controlled by Tom-Lee. The yellow men put two and two together, and kept silent.

It was from his neighbor Wing, the Chinese greengrocer, that Mark Hao heard of Chun Fong's death. Mark made no comment as he listened, sliding his iron to and fro on the board with rhythmic motion, but he was very thoughtful, remembering Nick's parting words. Mark Hao had no desire to meet Tom-Lee, the man of evil shadow, whose friendship was almost as dangerous as his enmity.

But two days later Tomelli himself came to Mark Hao's shop. He came on foot, at the twilight hour, accompanied by a beady-eyed man who remained on guard outside the shop, watching the street.

Tomelli was bigger even than Mark had imagined. His huge shoulders filled the doorway, his head seemed to brush the ceiling. A white-toothed smile with a touch of gold flashed from his swarthy face.

"Hi-ya, Mark!" Tomelli greeted breezily. "Nick tells me you saw him through a tough spot the other night, when the cops were hot after him. I want to square up with you."

Whereupon Tomelli pulled out a thick wad of bills and peeled off a few banknotes, throwing them carelessly across the counter. "How's that . . . okay?"

Mark Hao looked at him steadily, but made no motion to gather up the money. Tomelli was glancing over the little shop with a proprietary air. He picked up one of the neatly ticketed bundles from the shelves and looked at the Chinese writing.

"You got a tough racket, poundin' an iron all day," he said. "There's easier ways of makin' money."

Then he opened the faded cotton curtain at the doorway and peered into the back room. His eyes sharpened when he saw the side door. "Hm! That side alley runs through to Peking Court, doesn't it? Say, I could use this layout. Just what I been

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lookin' for. This joint'd make a swell post-office."

"Post-offiss?" Mark echoed uncertainly.

"You'll catch quick enough. Guess you wouldn't squawk if I showed you how to make a lot of extra dough, eh?"

Tomelli jerked his thumb toward the heavy-set man who waited outside. "That's Big Jim. He'll be back here some time tonight to explain things to you. Nothin' to it, Mark! And don't worry none about protection from the cops. I got Chinatown tucked away in my hip pocket. Well, I'll be seein' yuh!"

And without waiting for a reply, Tomelli swaggered out, whistling through his teeth and jingling the coins in his pocket. Mark Hao watched his departure with inscrutable face, the money still spread before him. Tom-Lee's money—a thing of evil, not to be touched. He took a piece of cloth to sweep the bills into the back part of his cash-drawer.

LOOKING down, Mark saw that his hands were trembling. He was afraid of Tom-Lee. He was afraid of Big Jim. And he was afraid of this secret, unrevealed thing called a post-offiss.

"O Kwan-Yin the Merciful, lend me of thy wisdom this night!" he prayed, lighting two of his very best quality joss-sticks. Then his eyes sought the glittering Long Sword in the place of honor beneath his ancestral tablets—the Weapon of Valor.

"I must be brave!" he whispered to himself. "The true blood of the Dragon must run in my veins, for I am my son's father!"

When darkness fell, Mark switched on the light and sat down upon a stool. He filled the thimble bowl of his long bamboo pipe and smoked slowly and steadily, motionless as a Buddha—waiting behind drawn blinds.

It was late—past eleven o'clock—when Big Jim's brisk rapping came at the side door. Mark Hao opened, his face blank and inscrutable, but his heart pounded like a muted gong.

Big Jim had a cardboard box under his arm. Inside it were little packets of neatly folded white papers and a number of small round tins, shining and unlabeled. He wasted no breath in getting down to business.

"Here's the first load of stock for your post-office, Mark. Twenty decks of Snow and two dozen cans of Black Gum. Count 'em, because you gotta sign for 'em, and later on you gotta pay us for 'em."

Big Jim took two little cards from his pockets, stamped with the Chinese good-luck insignia. One was white—the other black.

"Here's how the system works. A guy raps on your door and hands you one of these cards. If it's a white one, you sell him a paper of Snow. If it's black, one of these cans. But always get the money before you hand over the stuff—and don't try short-changin' the boss." Big Jim paused with a hard-eyed stare. "Chun Fong and his brother tried that. You know what happened to them!"

Mark Hao stirred uneasily, giving a slant-eyed stare at the box and its contents. "No wan'chee sell *chandu,*" he replied slowly. "Rice Face have strong law. Blue Coat Men catch, I go long time in jail-house."

Big Jim laughed. "You run your post-office, and let Tomelli worry about the law."

"No want!" Mark Hao repeated stubbornly. "I keep Rice Face law. You go 'way and take box of *chandu*. No want!"

Big Jim's eyes narrowed into a wicked glitter. His hand shot out and grasped the front of Mark's shirt, jerking him forward.

"Listen, Chink—you heard Tomelli say you're gonna run a post-office, and that's that. If you think you can give us the run-around, I'm gonna learn you somethin'!"

As if by magic, a blackjack appeared in Big Jim's hand. As he swung it, Mark tried to jerk aside, but not quite fast enough. A glancing blow made him reel backward before he fell in a sprawling heap.

Big Jim glanced down at him, flexing the leather thong. "You gonna be a good monkey now, or do I hafta sap you again?"

Mark Hao got up on one elbow, gather-

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ing his thin legs under him, a smoldering flicker in his black eyes. Hastily he scrambled backward as Big Jim advanced, and with the blind instinct of self-preservation his hand reached out and snatched up the Long Sword.

IT NEEDED but one thrust of the glittering weapon to change Mark Hao from hunted to hunter. The constant swinging of heavy flatirons had given his right arm muscles of steel, so that he wielded the blade as though it were a mere rapier.

Big Jim had faced gun and knife, blackjack and brass knuckles—but Big Jim had never faced a berserk Chinaman armed with a Long Sword, and only a wild leap to one side saved him from the first scythelike stroke that cut through the air.

A chair went flying against the wall, a V-shaped notch hacked out of its back. Mark Hao charged forward, lunging at Big Jim as if he meant to pin him against the wall in one furious drive.

Big Jim had to move faster than he had ever moved in his life. With a choking curse he tore open the door and plunged out into the darkness of the alley.

"Just you wait, Chink!" he snarled. "We'll be back!"

Mark Hao caught up the cardboard box and hurled it toward the voice from the blue mist. Then he slammed the door and shot the bolt. He was panting and trembling now, his mouth dry as a ball of cotton, but his eyes glittered like twin buttons of polished black jade.

The Long Sword had routed his enemy! There was a magic power in this Weapon of Valor—a power that struck fear even into this White Devil of the mighty Tom-Lee, so that he ran like a frightened coolie!

"Hai!" Mark breathed, brandishing the flashing blade.

But Mark Hao had uneasy dreams that night, and by the gray light of dawn his victory did not seem to be so cheaply bought. Tom-Lee would be very angry when he heard Big Jim's story—Tom-Lee would certainly strike back at him.

So Mark's frugal breakfast of rice-cake and tea was without savor that morning, and for the first time in many moons Mark Hao did not open his shop at the usual hour. Instead, he paid an early visit to Sing Lee's junk shop, where he purchased heavy strips of wood lattice, nails and a hammer, a strong chain-bolt, and an old brass gong about the size of a serving tray.

All that morning Mark pounded and hammered behind locked doors, fencing in his counters with the wooden lattice, so that all future transactions would take place through a small square opening. The battered old gong was also hung in place—not on the wall, but hanging down under the counter, where no one could see it.

And then Mark went to Wing his neighbor and said, "I have great fear of robbers in my shop, and I have made a trap for them. If thou shouldst hear the sudden banging of a gong from my shop, wilt thou run into the street and give alarm?"

"Gladly I promise it," Wing the grocer replied.

So Mark Hao pattered off a last prayer to Kwan-Yin and settled down to his usual labors behind the latticed shield, thumping his irons with extra vigor to make up for the time lost—but always with a quick flicking of the eye whenever footsteps sounded outside on Pagoda Street, or in the crooked alley which led to Peking Court.

At last the day ended, and the purple shadows of twilight sifted into the street as the sun dipped behind the rooftops. Here and there an early light burst forth like a sudden golden lily in the gathering gloom.

Mark Hao stood tense, motionless, his iron half lifted, as a black car came rolling slowly along the street and pulled up almost directly opposite his red-painted shop. A man with a chauffeur's cap sat behind the wheel, looking neither to right nor left as he waited, motor idling to a purring hum.

In a little while Mark resumed his work, but his slant-eyed scrutiny did not relax. Almost any White Devil might be one of Tom-Lee's men, spying out the road for

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his master, who seemed to stir and move about only in the dark hours, like the black-winged bats.

Then the bell over the shop door gave a sudden ting-a-ling, and a Rice Face man entered with brisk decision, but Mark Hao's swift alarm relaxed when he saw the brown paper bundle in the man's hands. This would be a customer—

"Got some laundry here," the Rice Face said crisply, putting down the bundle and ripping the string. His hand burrowed under the wrapping and came out holding a revolver.

"Get your hands up, Chink!" he snarled. "And stand still! One chirp outa you and I start pumpin' lead! Savvy?"

CONSTERNATION in his face, Mark crowded back against the shelves, his hands rising awkwardly. From the street came the sharp bang of the car door as the chauffeur climbed out and crossed swiftly toward the shop.

The man with the gun spoke to him without turning his head. "Rip down a section of that lattice," he directed, "so the Chink can climb over the counter."

"What wan'chee?" Mark quavered.

"We're takin' you for a little ride, Chink," the man replied. "Tomelli wants to see you!"

The chauffeur seized the lattice and gave a wrench. The wooden strips groaned and cracked, but held fast to their moorings.

Looking into the steady black muzzle of the gun, Mark Hao had a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach, but the thought of a visit to Tom-Lee was even worse. Mark squeezed his eyes shut, took a deep breath and made a sudden headlong dive beneath the counter. With frantic fists he pounded upon the old brass gong hanging there.

Bongg! Bonggg! Bongggg!

The clashing, shivering notes of the metal disk filled the air with a whirling fury of sound. Wing the grocer heard it, and rushed out into the street, howling "Poh-liss! Poh-liss!"

With startled curses Tomelli's men swung around and raced from the shop, flung themselves into the waiting car and sped away toward Mulberry Lane.

A policeman came down Pagoda Street on the run, but Mark Hao had already recovered his blank face and manner. "Two robber men with gun," he explained briefly. "I make noise with gong—they run plenty quick." As for their descriptions, all the Blue Coat Man could obtain was "Two Rice Face—one small—one big."

But Mark knew this was only a temporary victory—only a postponement of the day of reckoning with Tom-Lee. And he could see no way to avoid that dread meeting. In order to eat he must work—to obtain work his door must stand open to the public. Tom-Lee could strike again at any moment he chose.

THE next move, however, came not from Tom-Lee, nor from Big Jim, but from Nick—Nick, the man he had saved from the police. Nick walked into the shop the following morning, apparently quite recovered from his chest wound.

"Hold on, Chink!" he called out as Mark stiffened warily behind the lattice. "Don't get scared—all I wanta do is talk to you. You did me a damn good turn, and I'm tryin' to do one for you."

Nick paused to light a cigarette. "You must be off your nut, Chink, the way you been actin'. Tomelli's burned up plenty—he wanted you bumped off right away, but I talked him out of it, see. I tell him you're just a dumb monkey that don't know what it's all about."

"I keep Rice Face law," Mark replied. "No want Tom-Lee's post-offiss."

"Okay," Nick said with a crooked grin, "but you gotta clear out of this shop—take it on the lam. That's Tomelli's orders. I'm givin' you the straight dope, Chink—if you ain't outa here in three days you'll be goin' out feet first! Savvy?"

"I stay here!" Mark Hao replied with desperate stubbornness. "All day I work hard with iron to earn rice-money. I am not fighting man. I ask only peace. Tell Tom-Lee I swear by Tao to speak no word

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of him or of the forbidden *chandu* to the Blue Coat Men—"

"You don't get the idea, Chink," Nick interrupted. "It ain't you that Tomelli's after—he wants this shop of yours. It's got just the right kind of lay-out, and Tomelli gets what he wants. I'm warnin' you, Chink—beat it while you've got the chance. I can't do no more for you."

Nick turned toward the door, then swung around. "And don't try goin' to the cops. Tomelli has somebody watchin' you every minute—one move like that and you'll be a dead pigeon!"

Three days' grace!

Mark Hao brooded over each vanishing hour as it was snatched up and devoured by the Time-Dragon—brooded bitterly to the steady thumping of his iron—to his restless tossing on the sleeping *k'ang* at night.

Now only two days left!

Mark burned paper prayers by the handful and besought the guidance of Kwan-Yin, of Milo Fo, of Father Tao. He was afraid for his life—afraid with a stark, chilling fear—and yet there was something inside him stronger than fear. It was a certain pride—the Pride of the Long Swords—that rising stir of the Dragon-blood that came whenever he placed his hand upon the shining blade won by the valor of his son.

So, after a long night of fasting and prayer, Mark Hao came to his decision. Come what may, he must defend his humble niche—must defy the power of Tom-Lee.

GRIMLY Mark Hao prepared for a siege. He put in a plentiful supply of food. He strengthened the chain-bolts on the doors and buttressed his lattice-work. He relied only on himself, and on the strange power which exalted him whenever he touched the Long Sword.

Somehow the story spread through Chinatown—a secret whisper that brought a slant-eyed flicker from the yellow men's eyes as they passed the red-painted shop on Pagoda Street, with a quick glance at the reckless man who dared to flaunt the mighty Tom-Lee.

The last day came and went. All night long Mark Hao lay awake, tortured by the stealthy, secret noises of the dark hours, so that he greeted the dawn with red-rimmed, sleepless eyes.

"Why do I tremble and shiver?" he exhorted himself fiercely. "Soon or late comes the day when every man must take the Long Road to the Shadow-World. If this be the day appointed for my turn, I shall but meet my son again the sooner, and when he asks 'Honorable Father, you have guarded well the Sword of Valor?' I shall be able to look into his eyes with a straight look and answer in a firm voice."

Thus spoke Mark Hao, the peaceful laundryman of Pagoda Street, thumping his iron in the face of death and destruction. Twice during the morning a Blue Coat Man sauntered through the street, but it did not even occur to Mark Hao to rap on the window and beckon him inside to listen to his story.

Then late in the afternoon Mark Hao had an unexpected visitor—the Slipper, or official messenger, of the Tsin Tien Tong, with a command that Mark Hao present himself at once before the Council of Five.

His heart leaped in gladness at the news. At last—help! No doubt one of his fellow tongmen had placed the story of his desperate plight before the Council, and now they were about to rally to his assistance.

Hurriedly Mark put on his street robe and round black hat, locked the door, and hastened to the tong-house on Mulberry Lane. But when he was led into the Council chamber he found five harsh and unfriendly faces awaiting him.

Surprised and disconcerted by this cold reception, Mark stammered out the details of his embroilment with Tom-Lee's activities, and was then conducted into a side-room to await the Council's lengthy deliberations.

"Brother Hao," said the Elder Councillor, on his return to the meeting chamber, "we fear you have made yourself a cause of trouble and danger to this Honorable

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Tong. In order that peace may be preserved, it is our command that you visit one of our brethren in a distant city, and that you stay with him until we give you permission to return."

"Is this justice to a brother in distress?" Mark Hao stammered, then a rush of anger choked him. "You speak with the voice of the Tsin Tien Council, but your words are the words of Tom-Lee! I—I will not obey!"

The Five Councillors leaped to their feet with angry cries, and the Elder clapped his hands, so that the Slipper came running.

"*Hola!* Fetch me the Bowl of Brotherhood!" the Elder cried, and when the red-glazed bowl stood before him, he hunted through the painted bamboo splints which filled it until he found the one bearing Mark Hao's name. He broke the stick into small pieces and cast them upon the floor.

"From this moment, Mark Hao, you are no longer a Brother of the Tsin Tien Tong. You are cast out—forbidden entry to this house forever after. Go forth from here—a stranger and an enemy to all members of this Honorable Tong!"

"Cowards!" Mark Hao cried. "Cowards all, before the anger of Tom-Lee. You are many, and bow down like slaves before this White Devil of Evil Ways. I am but one man, and alone—but I do not fear him! I will face him, aye, and I will fight him—to the death!"

Proudly Mark Hao made a brief kowtow and marched from the Council chamber, an exile and an outcast.

BUT the boiling anger which had sustained him before the Tsin Tiens cooled and drained away as Mark made his way back to Pagoda Street through the gathering darkness. Cautiously he surveyed the deep shadows of the alleyway to Peking Court before he put the big iron key into his side door and entered.

With a sigh of relief he locked the door on the inside, but even as he groped for the light switch he became aware of a strange stirring in the air, as if a window stood open somewhere.

Then the light flashed on, and Mark Hao's breath caught with a hiss. Tom-Lee! Tom-Lee himself was sitting there on the *k'ang,* looking at him with a slow, hard smile.

The Long Sword! With the magic Sword in his hand he could face anything, even the cruel smile of Tom-Lee. Mark Hao leaped toward the shelf which held the glittering blade, but Tomelli pounced like a great lithe cat—wrested the weapon from his hands and sent him spinning against the wall.

Mark turned then and made a dash for the door, but as his fingers clawed at the chain-bolt, he was seized on either side by two men who had been waiting behind the curtained doorway. One was Big Jim, the other the man who had driven the black car on their previous attempt.

"Bring him here, boys," Tom-Lee said, and Mark Hao, both arms pinioned, was shoved forward.

"I gave you three days to clear out, Chinky," Tom-Lee said. "I don't give out orders more'n once."

Tomelli's big hand swung up and across—a vicious blow that made Mark Hao's head bob like a cork on a stormy sea. Left—right—left—right—Tomelli's hand swept in sadistic brutality.

Mark Hao's eyes were blackened, his lips puffed out and bleeding, blood trickled from his nose, but he would not cry out nor beg for mercy, even when Tomelli's fist smashed into his face and Tomelli's knee was driven into his stomach.

Dazed and only half conscious, Mark sagged limply between the two men who held his arms. A broken tooth dropped from his swollen lips.

"That's just a little sample, Chink, by way of warnin'," Tomelli said. "If you're not out of Chinatown by tomorrow morning, we'll come around again and finish the job."

At a signal from Tomelli, the two men stepped back, releasing Mark Hao's arms. He doubled over and fell in a limp heap. Tomelli kicked him, but he did not stir.

"He's out," Big Jim said. "Out like a light."

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"Come on," Tomelli ordered, "we'll give the joint a goin' over."

By way of a starter, he yanked the red curtains from the doorway and flung them aside. Behind drawn shades in the shop they tumbled Mark's neat bundles of laundry from the shelves and scattered their contents in hopeless confusion.

Then they set to work on Mark's private quarters. They stripped and overturned his sleeping *k'ang* and emptied his canisters of rice and tea, soy beans and melon seeds, all over the floor. Tomelli kicked out the props which supported the prayer-shrine. It fell with a crash that jarred Mark Hao from his semi-dazed condition.

But Mark Hao lay still, fighting for breath, for strength. He saw his prayer bowls and incense and ancestral tablets being kicked and trampled into shapeless debris. He saw the precious letters from his dead son Chan being ground underfoot.

Tomelli stopped at last, surveying the wreckage with grinning satisfaction. "That'll teach Chinky we mean business!" he said. Then he noticed the Long Sword lying in the debris, and picked it up.

"Hm! Not a bad hunk of steel. Looks like it might be worth a few bucks, too. Think I'll take it along, as a souvenir."

With the sword tucked under his arm, Tomelli swaggered out into the night, followed by the chauffeur. But Big Jim called out, "Be with you in a minute, Boss," and returned to the front of the shop.

Mark Hao swayed to his knees as Tomelli passed through the doorway. The Long Sword! His precious weapon—gone—stolen! He would never see it again—never feel its magic touch!

THE Chinaman staggered to his feet, fired by an elemental anger such as he had never experienced before—a white-hot flare of primitive rage that steadied his shaking legs, armed his quivering muscles with the strength of ten men.

He heard Big Jim stirring about in the outer shop, and made for the doorway. Big Jim had found the money-till under the counter, and was helping himself to its contents. He gave a rumbling growl of surprise at seeing the Chinaman on his feet, and lunged toward him, swinging a pistol butt.

There was only one weapon within reach of Mark Hao's hand—a heavy flat-iron standing on the counter. Mark snatched it up and swung wildly as Big Jim clubbed at him. Big Jim's hand was driven back against the sharp edge of the shelves—bones cracked—the gun dropped—and he let out a bellowing howl of agony.

Grasping his mashed and splintered hand, Big Jim started running as a wounded animal runs—out of the shop and through the dark alley, his breathing choked by sobbing moans.

For a moment Mark Hao looked down at the flat-iron in astonishment, surprised to find this ordinary working tool become so formidable a weapon. Then with a rising shout of *"Hai! Hai!"* he spun around and went dashing after the wounded man.

Big Jim was stumbling along in the darkness, still moaning, and hearing Mark Hao's flying steps gaining on him, cried out, "Help! Help, Tomelli! The Chink!" Then his foot slipped on the mossy bricks and he went sprawling with a drawn-out cry of fear.

But Mark Hao, intent only on recovery of the precious sword Tomelli had stolen from him, made a flying leap over the sprawling body and plunged on into the misty blue fog of Peking Court.

Both Tom-Lee and the man with the chauffeur's cap had passed from sight and sound, but Mark knew they would be heading for that mysterious door at Number Fourteen, and he raced on, setting his course by the weird yellow glow of the lamp-post which marked the exit to Half Moon Street.

But he was too late—Tomelli had already reached the steps of Number Fourteen and was turning his key in the lock when the chauffeur beside him heard footsteps padding through the blue mist.

"Look out, Boss, it's the Chink!" he cried out, and Tomelli turned with a snarl. His gun spat bright strips of orange flame into

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the darkness, and the pursuing figure below him wavered, threw up its arms, and pitched forward with a gasping cry.

"Big Jim!" the chauffeur babbled excitedly. "You shot Big Jim! It wasn't the Chink!"

Tomelli cursed vividly as he sprang down the steps and bent over the bullet-riddled man.

AND then Mark Hao sprang upon them out of darkness like the fabled Dragon of Vengeance—a whirling dervish armed with one terrible, iron-shod fist. Tom-Lee's chauffeur screamed as the flailing flat-iron caught him squarely on the chest and sent him flying head over heels. On hands and knees he crawled away into the darkness, whimpering.

Tomelli's gun came around with lightning speed, but his first shot at Mark Hao went wild, and before he could pull the trigger again, Mark hurled the heavy iron at his head. The sharp point caught Tomelli's temple, spun him completely around, and dropped him as if sandbagged.

The Long Sword fell from his grasp with a clatter, and Mark pounced upon it and ran. Windows were going up everywhere in the Court, lights flashing on, voices calling out—from Half Moon Street came the sudden shrilling of a police whistle.

Unnoticed in the confusion, Mark Hao raced back through the dark alley and darted into his shop. Then a great weakness came over him, so that he leaned against the wooden panels, his breath whistling hoarsely in his throat.

But the Long Sword was safe—safe forever from the desecrating hands of Tom-Lee. Mark Hao's fingers wandered gently along the shining blade, as a blind man might read the beauty of a piece of carved *fei-tsui* jade.

The noises from Peking Court were growing louder every moment, and the alleyway outside his door echoed with the swift pad-pad of hurrying footsteps as the news spread through the adjacent streets and courts. Then a sudden disturbing thought flashed into Mark Hao's mind, and he slipped out again and stealthily followed the procession to Peking Court, where he glided along the outer edges of the crowd.

Several Blue Coat men now stood guard over the bodies of Tom-Lee and Big Jim, which Sergeant O'Hara was examining by flashlight.

"It's an open-and-shut case, Sergeant," one of the Blue Coats said. "Big Jim and Tomelli had a fight—while they were sluggin' each other, Tomelli pulled a gun and let him have it."

"Okay," Sergeant O'Hara said, "but Big Jim never made a dent like that in Tomelli's forehead with his bare fist. He must've had some kind of a weapon. Look around and see if you can find it."

But the Blue Coat never did lay their hands on the peculiar weapon which had killed Tomelli. Mark Hao managed to find it first, which was the reason for his hurried return to the scene. Quietly he slipped away, the flat-iron clutched under his arm.

Not that Mark Hao had any knowledge of clues or fingerprints or anything like that. Mark wanted that flat-iron because he would have great need of it on the morrow. Ahead of him lay many long hours of steady thumping with the iron before the trampled debris Tom-Lee had left behind could be restored to the red-painted shelves as neatly ticketed bundles of laundry.

However, Mark foresaw a certain amount of trouble over the death of Tom-Lee. It was a matter which would have to be taken up with the old *bonze* at the Plum Blossom Joss House. No doubt the *bonze* would order special prayers to be painted, and to be burned with Number One grade of Lotus Bud incense.

This must be seen to.

But Mark Hao was quite sure that Kwan-Yin the Merciful, the All-Seeing, would heed his fervent prayers and forgive him the disgrace of having used a lowly and commonplace weapon as a flat-iron in defending the Honor of the Long Sword.

Mark Hao held firmly to the simple faiths of his ancestors.

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The Saturnians wheeled to meet us; and we fought beneath a weird nightmare of action overhead.

Satans on Saturn

By OTIS A. KLINE and E. HOFFMANN PRICE

CHAPTER XXIV

SUICIDE SQUAD

I DIDN'T know what to say, but Valene did. This was her argument: "Even if you did win, you might not be able to return. So I came along."

"You'll be a great help," I said, being annoyed and flattered at once. "You barely get out of one jam when you do your best to get right into another."

"If you think you're going to be marooned with that crowd of Titanian ladies, you're crazy," she retorted.

The first installment of this five-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for November 2

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"So I see." The crew was grinning. They enjoyed the encounter immensely. My ears were getting red. "Listen, my chick! You dive for cover and keep out of everyone's way. We're going to be busy in a few more minutes."

Her eyelashes drooped. She demurely said, "I'm so sorry I'm in the way. If I'd known you'd feel this way about it, I'd have stayed at home."

She would not have, but there was nothing further to say. And that the crew thought it was a rare joke was a good sign. They were in high spirits, and spoiling for a fight with the Saturnians. That counted a lot. But I began to realize that John Parker's ideas on women being pests did not need to be verified with a slide rule.

Our attack was a complete surprise. Far below, the opalescent domes of the hothouse glowed like great eyes from Titan's gloom. I could catch the sheen of the hangars, the metal-roofed shops, the network of glistening runways along which the space cruisers were drawn when they were moved from one department to the other.

No signals came in from any of the fleet. The ether was to be kept undisturbed, unless the scouts had to notify us of an approaching Saturnian cruiser. Our arrival had been planned to fit into the lull in outgoing and inbound traffic from the ringed planet.

The leading flight swoped in perfect formation. Our searchlights blazed, long white fingers reaching down to the gleaming metal and glass. Then the long-drawn concussion as the first broadside let go.

Smoke and dust and flying debris blown from the buildings below made it hard for us to see. The leading flight nosed up, and the second one dipped down, guns blazing. As we came out of the low-hanging fumes, I saw the third wedge diving; the second, enveloped by gases and dust and fragments, was invisible. Only the rumble of explosives, and the scream of flying wreckage proved its existence.

There was no answering fire, because the Saturnians, unprepared for a mass invasion, had no artillery except on their docked ships. And they were in the midst of the twisted tangle of girders and roofing.

We did not attack the hothouse proper. To do so would expose the Titanians to the mercy of the bitter chill outdoors.

Then a Saturnian cruiser rose from the swirling fumes. Despite our fire, the vast extent of the shops and hangars could not be covered in our first succession of dives. Another emerged, firing as she cleared the dense clouds of smoke.

ON THE ground, I could barely distinguish one of our flights, which had landed just as the others opened fire. Japetans poured from the hatches. They bounded into the surging fumes. Each wore fire- and acid-proof armor, and carried an acid projector.

This detachment was charging toward the administration building to keep the aroused Saturnians from summoning help from the ringed planet, or notifying cruisers plying between satellites.

More ships escaped the concentrated fire than I had expected. As the first flight circled back to blast the riddled target with another broadside of explosive and acid, a disabled cruiser opened fire from the ground. Others, upended by our shells and kept from settling back because of girders and wall sections that had crumbled, thrust their noses through the clouds, and brought into play what guns had not been disabled.

The increasing reply to our attack convinced me that the Saturnians were rallying, manning the turrets of cruisers that had been disabled for flight. They were stubborn and desperate.

Ion's flight was on the tail of the first ship to pull clear of the wrecked air-dock. One of my flight was blown out of action by fire from the ground. And the fugitives, long streamers of flame pouring out of their propulsion tubes, were heading for Saturn.

One, swinging to avoid Ion's guns, crashed headlong into a ship trying to head him off. A lucky shell disabled an-

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other. But we had no fuel for further scouting. In the confusion, no one knew whether or not every fugitive had been overtaken and destroyed.

One by one, the flight swooped down into the clouds of smoke. This was no time for regrets. We had our work on the ground. The engineer reported, "Thirty seconds more fuel supply!"

A cruiser, lacking power, nosed down and crashed.

I don't know how many seconds more we could have stayed in the air; but it was probably just about as long as a man could hold his breath. Now that the observation compartment shield had been lifted, and we could see by direct vision, I learned that we had our hands full.

Hordes of Saturnians raced about. Some had edged weapons, others had flame throwers, and all were making the most of their naturally fiery breath. Without waiting for us to come out of our cruisers, they darted toward the dead spaces between gun turrets; these groups had cutting devices to pierce the hulls so that they could catch us at close quarters.

As our crews scrambled into fire-proof armor, I figured a way of handling these fire-breathing guys. The order went over the visiphone. With what power we had available, each cruiser was shifted so that when we were on the ground again, the guns of one would cover the dead spaces of the other.

Then, leaving some of the crew at their posts to maintain this defense, the rest of us went out to mop up.

Our idea was to exterminate the enemy; but it seemed they had the same idea about us. The Saturnians who had fled from the administration building and into the further reaches of the hothouses were rallying. They had rounded up Titanian slaves to march before them as human shields.

Behind this living barrier, they advanced. Others counter-attacking from the flanks, hurled rocks and pieces of shattered girders at the Japetan forces. Whenever flame-proof armor was torn, the wearer was finished by the backlash of the weapons of his own comrades, if not by the flaming breath of the towering Saturnians.

SOME, desperate, peeled off their armor and used their wings; with the exchange of flame, these winged Satans could endure what to them was terrific cold. Soaring overhead, they dropped wreckage on the advancing Jepetans.

Some of these things I saw; others I learned later. During it all, I led a patrol into the smoking wreckage of the hangars and shops. We had to clean out every disabled ship, just in case some desperate Saturnian tried to get it into the air.

They rallied in groups. Tall, raging, exhaling flame and smoke; some wore space suits, and faced acid until man and armor collapsed from corrosion. And when this happened, the disintegration of the dying Saturnian created such a vortex of heat as to drive us back, yards at a time.

My own men, raked and battered by the slave goads or the impromptu weapons snatched by the Saturnians, breathed in flame and acid that leaked through their slashed armor; they spun dizzily, dropped, and we hurdled them in our advance. There was no treating the fallen, for nothing could help anyone who had inhaled a gust of flame or corrosive gas.

Groups of Saturnians, literally going nuts, peeled off their armor, gathered in compact masses, and rushed us. They faced quick destruction; but in their frenzy they laughed at that and charged, flame gushing from mouths and nostrils. These suicidal attacks broke, but only after whole squads of Japetans had been roasted in their own armor, which had its limits.

But finally we fought out way through that smoky hell, clambering over girders, gun turrets, ribs and plates blown from cruisers. We cornered the last Saturnians. Some stood and faced us. Others, more cunning or less desperate, ran out into the frozen wastes of Titan.

These would perish, or else return for a final counter-attack. Whether they

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planned to steal a ship and escape, we did not know. But we did know that we were stranded on the satellite until we could salvage fuel from the wrecked cruisers in the hangars; the crude *nari* could not be used until it was treated and blended.

So with perhaps half of my detachment surviving, I turned back toward the administration building. A glance at the formation of ships reassured me. The ranks were unbroken. Valene and the guards were safe, though Saturnians were heaped in windrows all about the group.

CHAPTER XXV

CORNERED

WE ARMED as many Titanian slaves as we could, and put them at the head of each party that searched the huge interior of the hothouse. The idea was not to use them as shock troops but to increase their morale. Most of them were horrified at the vengeance to come, but some of the bolder ones needed little persuasion.

Not more than a few dozen Saturnians were routed out of hiding. They did not last long. The encounters were small-scale repetitions of the nasty fight we'd had in the shops and hangars; but these skirmishes made a new race out of the Titanians. The cattle had become men.

"Ion," I said when the last Saturnian in the hothouse had been cornered, "we've go to get some of these people out. Half the fleet will be used to carry them to Japetus. The other half will stay here, in case the alarm did get to Saturn."

"You mean to be on their tails, so they can't pursue?"

"Right on the nail!"

"The idea is fine," he went on, frowning. "Except that we need fuel."

He had forgotten the wrecked cruisers in the hangars. When I reminded him, he rounded up a gang to get to work. Now that the show was over, for the time, Valene came out of shelter. She caught me off guard, while I was watching Ion march his men to the smoking ruins.

"You look as if you've lost the fight," she said.

"Huh. The fight hasn't started yet," I told her. "Just to make your visit pleasant, I'll let you in on a secret. Our only chance of a getaway, or even of defense, is cutting up those twisted wrecks and salvaging the fuel for our cruisers. And that's not a matter of minutes."

She didn't bat an eyelash. I tried to give her a hard-boiled look and a growl to match; I was worried about her having poked her pert little nose into what promised to be a one-way trip if we didn't make good time in every move.

She laughed at me! "Quit that, sourface! You've not failed yet. And I wouldn't have missed this for anything. Listen to them, in the hothouse!"

The Titanians were singing. Long files of them danced around in the eerie glow of the great dome. This was different from the night when they had watched Valene paraded before them as an example of what happened to rebels and fugitives.

"And I should be grinning, huh? Suppose something does let them down, at the last minute?"

"But look at how long it'll take for a messenger to get to Saturn, if one of those ships did escape," she insisted. "And then the trip back."

She was right. Just the same, I wasn't as cocky as I had been at first. I smelled trouble, and I didn't know just why. Maybe it made me the skeleton at the banquet, but I cut into the celebration and got the Titanians to work.

THEY formed a basket brigade; long lines of them, shoulder to shoulder, passing parcels of salvaged fuel from hand to hand. In that way each cruiser, served by its own line, was refueled as rapidly as the next.

Some, drunk with victory, grumbled at being marched back to the ore grinding and blending plant. But Ion and his officers put the fear of Saturn in their hearts.

Valene, for all her ready smile and backtalk, ended by standing on her tiptoes.

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The race against an invisible enemy was getting her on edge. Finally she whispered, "I'm getting shaky myself. What are you holding back? Did a message get through? Didn't the first rush block the signal house in time? Tell me!"

"I don't know. It's a hunch."

Relief shifts of Titanians took the places of those who reeled as they stood there, merely releasing a basket before another one passed along to take its place. In spite of their exertions, they shivered in the bitter night. We reversed ventilation fans, so that hot air from the domes swept them, but the whistling winds scattered that warmth; we couldn't heat the whole satellite.

Blue-lipped, teeth chattering, they stumbled back into the domes, and new gangs, already shivering at the thought of what was ahead, took their places. The Saturnians had never worked them so mercilessly, and the liberated slaves cursed their freedom.

If they weren't ripe for mutiny, I was crazy. Since we weren't Saturnians, they felt that we had no right to drive them to exhaustion.

But when the surprise did come, it caught me off guard.

One of Ion's Japetans came dashing out of the administration building. He shouted and gestured as he ran, but I couldn't understand him. Valene and I turned to meet him. Those in the basket line nearest him were dropping their parcels of fuel and running toward the domes.

Then I caught it. He gasped, "Signals! Fleet from Saturn! Picked up signals! Coming this way!"

"You're crazy," I said. "They couldn't be out here already. Get back on the job, you! Ion, round those fellows up!" I caught the messenger by the shoulder. "Take your time and talk slow!"

He gulped, gestured some more, and repeated, "No mistaking it. Picked up orders passing from ship to ship."

The Titanians were trampling each other in their hurry to get back into the domes, which their Saturnians would probably hesitate to destroy. Others, with more spirit, were running to the weapons and armor they had discarded upon going to work. The messenger repeated, "I can't be mistaken! The voices weren't human."

WE HAD taken on enough fuel for maneuvering, even if not for retreat to Japetus. Ion passed the word along into the hangars. His men came running out. The invading crews, followed by the more pugnacious Titanians, headed for the cruisers. There was no time to make any plan, or issue any order—not until the hatches were battened and we were ready to take the air.

Ion waved from the port of the control room of his ship. Then the screen was lowered. Communication was then carried on by visiphone. "Send out patrols," I said, and gave orders for the several flights. "And keep in touch. Don't risk any fights if you can help it. If we're outnumbered, we can do better on the ground."

The main reason for taking off was to be ready to settle any small detachment before its commander could become suspicious and send word back to Saturn. I still felt that whatever patrol was approaching could not be on the way in response to news of our attack.

Aside from scouting flights, the fleet hovered low, and near the outlying ravines and craters. If it came to the worst, we could shelter some of the ships against attack, and perhaps get the enemy to risk a landing party—which would be to our advantage.

The next few minutes verified the alarm. The air was hot with signals; Saturnian skippers announcing their intention to land. Then, though we were skimming low, they sighted us, and we saw them.

These were not patrols nor transports, but long, bronze-colored monsters such as Parker and I had first seen in the valley of the Orinoco, the evening we learned that Saturnians were raiding Terra. The size, the shape, the color, all were revealed by the glow of the repulsion tubes.

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Searchlights blazed. The skippers of the leading ships already sensed that something was wrong; they were not getting proper coöperation from the ground.

As we tuned in, a Saturnian voice made the visiphone shudder. I did as much myself. Thorgulu, the Arch-Mogôk, was cursing the heavens and every satellite. He promised to blow us out of the air if someone did not explain in a hurry.

I never did learn who fired the first shot; whether one of our gunners, or one of the enemy's. But in split seconds, the problem became, "Who isn't firing?"

The stars were hidden out by monstrous ships. We were outweighed and outnumbered. As we tried to scatter, Thorgulu's fleet spread in a vast crescent to surround us. He probably did not suspect that our fuel was too limited; that if we had fled, we would have become derelicts in space, to be picked off at will.

Disabled ships crashed against the jutting crags. Thorgulu, leading the center of the half-circle, was forced down by our returning scouts, who swooped from overhead. And then our fleet, stringing out, flattened into the ravine we had picked during our brief preparation for the emergency.

Some were blasted to junk as they landed. Others maneuvered into the shelter of overhanging ledges. And with crashes resulting from hasty landing, scarcely more than half of the Japetan fleet survived the running fight.

They had us bottled up.

ENOUGH of the Saturnian circled overhead to keep us under cover. The others landed on foot to inspect the wreckage of the hangars, and to regain control of the slaves in the hothouse domes.

Thorgulu, calling from his grounded flagship, demanded surrender. We recognized each other over the visiphone screens. That was natural enough, after our long cruise from Terra to Saturn.

"Turn over your arms and leave your ships, Bradley," he demanded, "and I'll give you transportation back to Earth."

"Why don't you send a crew over to me? Or us?" I countered. "You're not weakening, are you?"

Flame and smoke for a moment obscured his sharp face. Then he retorted, "We can blow up the whole ravine. Bury you and your mutineers."

"Just try it!" I yelled. "We'll get out on foot, and how will you like chasing us in this temperature? And you'll have to get us, or we'll cook up something else."

He turned a deep reddish purple, clenched his claws. He sputtered and roared with fury. Orderlies came from the signal compartment with messages. He listened a moment. I couldn't hear what they told him, but his remarks made it clear enough that the subdued Titanians had explained.

"I'll give you enough ships to take your whole party to Japetus, or back to Terra."

"You're too anxious to be friendly," I told him. "If you want us, come down in these ravines and get us."

No Saturnian ever liked to play in a network of caverns; the Japetans had convinced them that such tactics did not pay. I cut off the visiphone. That would finish what remained of Thorgulu's temper. There was a chance of tempting him to recklessness.

Meanwhile, all escape seemed to be cut off. Ion reminded me, quite needlessly, that this was the case. "Maybe he really wants us out of here before the slaves become too daring. The Saturnians don't want to kill them off to regain control. He doesn't want a suicidal rush. They're valuable property, and a lot of them have found new courage. It might spread."

He offered me this argument as we crept along sheltered ledges toward a cavern where we could meet the other officers in council.

"You're right," I had to admit. "That's reasonable. He could place some ships where we could get at them without running any risk of being nabbed. But he's too anxious to make peace with us. There's a catch somewhere."

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The council spent some hours trying to figure out just what lay behind Thorgulu's desire for a truce. We arrived at no conclusion.

"I don't trust him," declared a gray-bearded Japetan. "It'd be a shame to let the Titanians down, after the good start we made."

Another said, "We've had good luck handling these fellows on foot. Maybe we can spring a surprise and get a fresh hold on things."

That was worth trying. While Thorgulu's forces had heard of our success in hand-to-hand work, and had seen the remains of their fellows, they had not witnessed our procedure in action; thus they would hardly expect counter-attack.

THE space cruisers that had circled overhead finally withdrew and landed. As Thorgulu got more details about our raid, he realized that before we could make a break, his fleet could overtake us and blow us to bits.

So without knowing it, he played into our hands. We left a small detachment with each cruiser, and then set out on foot to win what small chance we had of catching the enemy off guard.

If this succeeded, we could escape before Thorgulu decided to blast our hiding places about our ears. Trying to leave on our own initiative seemed far more prudent than accepting his terms. Or so we thought, as we crept into the darkness of the week-long Titanian night.

Saturnians were already at work repairing the damage done by our raid. According to our reckoning, forces from the ringed planet must already be on the way, unless our surprise attack had cut off every one of the few ships that had survived the initial blasting.

Then we saw the far-off glow.

"Bigger fleet than the one that drove us down," Ion groaned.

His words passed from man to man. For a moment we were frozen, beyond hope of despair. The sky held a red promise; and the nearer it came, the more we realized that thus far we had seen only the shadow of Saturnian power. Vengeance was on the way.

My thought was: They'll clean up here, and then knock Japetus out of its orbit. Blow it to dust.

If we had not been so shocked, there would have been a panic. Saturnians were manning their ships. We could see the dark masses silhouetted against the reflection of the hothouse dome lights from the bronze-colored hulls of the cruisers.

"Back to cover," I yelled. Then I changed that order. "Hold it!"

Something big was happening in space. Sheets of flame outlined the fleet that had been marked only by repulsion tube glow. We heard no sounds. In the thin layer of Titanian air, it should not take long for the vibration to reach us.

Silence meant that the explosions—those prodigious flashes could be nothing else—were far above the Titanian stratosphere; that the great expanse of the fleet had made us underestimate the distance.

"It's a battle!" Ion cried. "Revolution in Saturn! Civil war!"

CHAPTER XXVI

SLIDE-RULE PARKER

THE Saturnian attack on the space ship plant in north central Canada turned out not to be as ruinous as John Parker and Shadra had at first expected.

In the first place, while every one of the partially assembled ships had been damaged, the reconditioning was mainly a matter of working on the hulls and the propulsion machinery; for the complex and costly instruments for navigation, artillery fire, control, and visiphone communication had not yet been installed.

Furthermore, the Saturnians had been decisively defeated in a mass attack; the non-magnetic shells had pierced the repulsion screens and brought the icthyform space ships down; and field pieces, firing shells with fuses cut for muzzle bursts, blew the supposedly invulnerable Saturnians to pieces.

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And—far too important for incidental mention—the wrecked space cruisers had bunkers loaded with disintegrator fuel.

Parker said to Colonel Watson, now officer in charge of the assembly plant, "Colonel, it is not as bad as it looked." He telescoped his slide rule, and put it into its worn and battered case. "As long as the propaganda department keeps up civilian morale, we can get those damaged space cruisers reconditioned, make a surprise attack on the Saturnian base in northern Mexico, and try the effect of our shells filled with frozen hydrogen."

Shadra retouched her make-up, and tried to think of new arguments to keep Parker from personally leading the raid in Mexico. The hurry and roar of Terra, though fascinating enough, still kept the girl from Titan on edge; particularly the assembly plant where she and Parker had desks.

She regarded her mirrored reflection with dismay, for the Terrestrian scientists had not yet succeeded in eliminating the excess of blue from their heatless glow tubes. "Not bad, though," she had to admit, "except it makes one's lips almost mulberry. And those rings under my eyes—"

She looked up, and noted the necrotic pallor of Parker's long, thin face. The ruddy colonel was an outrageous blue-bronze-purple. Shadra brightened. *Everyone* was awful under Terrestrian cold light, though it was easy on the eyes—and in spite of the stroboscopic effect which Parker threatened to eliminate once the Saturnian problem was solved.

The colonel was saying, "The electronic welding works out nicely, with a blanketing jet of argon to keep that touchy alloy from oxidizing before it's cooled. Don't worry, Dr. Parker; the Engineer Corps will get that squadron fixed up. And the Antarctic assembly plant has a number of units almost ready. To say nothing of the plant in Greenland."

Parker's face lengthened. He took his slide rule out of his case, and made a few settings. They had nothing to do with the problem at hand, but after recording the result, he looked up and said, "As long as the propaganda department keeps up civilian morale, we're all right; but what assurance have we?"

The colonel laughed. "Don't borrow trouble. We'll even capture you a Saturnian for experimental purposes, so you'll know beyond any doubt that solidified hydrogen settles those fire-breathers."

Shadra still regarded her mirrored image, and not from any undue feminine vanity. She was weary, and the twitch at the corner of her eye told her that she would have to keep shorter office hours. She told herself, "That's just the stroboscopic effect of that vapor lamp, I can't be jittering as much as all that!"

But to make sure, she switched on the photo-visotype. As the tape began to unreel, light reflected from polished keys flashed to the sensitized tape, and a vapor bath almost instantly developed the photographic image: a modernization of the noisy teletype that used to drive newspapermen mad, and made stock brokers dive out of windows.

THE blossoming out of a word at a time, instead of a letter at a stroke, made photo-visotype easy on the eyes, but it had this defect: it was just enough out of step with the vapor lights to require a light of its own. Some blamed this on the inventor's shrewdness, others on the profit-mindedness of manufacturers. At the moment, Shadra was not concerned with this detail.

She watched the words jerk, shift, shudder in the most eyewrenching way. She shook her blond head, and sighed. "Well, I am not as shaky as I thought. A visotype would hardly develop a twitch, and my eyelids just seem to flutter."

But Shadra saw enough of the words on the jerking tape to make her cry, "John, look at this! Colonel, you are missing something!"

She snapped on the reading light; there was no longer any twitch, and the tape flowed smoothly along, word after word coming up black on its surface. Parker

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rose, took one step, and then readjusted his glasses.

The colonel's face changed; he turned a deeper blue-plum color, cursed and said, "They're crazy! It can't be! Not after we beat them so decisively."

But there it was:

. . . rioting . . . Chicago out of hand . . . Buenos Aires under mob rule . . . Argentine dictatorship consolidating . . . South American republics to treat with Saturnians . . . Scientist Parker's hydrogen shell a delusion, scientific organizations discredited. Canadian victory pointless. South American congress plans compromise. Citizens owning less than a square kilometre of land, or income less than one thousand pazoors annually liable to draft on Saturnian demand . . .

"No wonder they're revolting!" the colonel howled. "The air is full of proposals like that! Panic spreads, there is no telling when some crackpot will suggest something like that up here. And then we *will* have riots!"

Shadra said, "John, maybe it is quieter and safer back on Titan. If these beastly Terrestrians are calling you a delusion, after all your work, after all your study, after the way you have worn yourself to a shred, it'd serve them right if you left.

"And you too, Colonel, you and your silly conceited Army artillerymen; you could not take a chance on a hydrogen shell, you were afraid John would get a reputation, and that your antiquated pop guns would be condemned."

The colonel threw up his hands. "Now steady, young lady! You've put it just a little too strong. Well, maybe we were a little too eager to prove old-fashioned methods are the soundest. Unconsciously, I mean, not intentionally. Parker, I'll get in touch with the President at once; the department of propaganda must be armed with the very latest word from this plant."

The colonel eyed Parker; his jaw sagged, and he reached out. "You don't look as if you heard a word I said."

Shadra caught his arm. "Let him alone, Colonel; he gets that way every so often. Call the President, and I'll get the last minute reports."

A CALL from any assembly plant received preferred attention; the President's chief secretary was on the visiphone in less than a minute after the colonel had put through the code symbols.

Shadra pressed a switch, and then waited little over a minute for a red blinker to light up on the panel of the automatic selector. She opened the magnetic conduit, and removed the ferri-silicon container into which the reports had been rolled, down in the filing department.

Shadra removed the papers and stepped to the visiphone. "Here they are, Colonel. Our latest plan, and—"

Just then Parker interposed, absent-mindedly thrust the girl aside as if she had been a misplaced swivel chair, and said over the officer's shoulder, "Here's the answer, Your Excellency. Please ignore Colonel Watson's well-meant suggestion; we simply do not have time."

The President took that with a smile. His friendly, unruffled voice and twinkling eyes showed that he believed more in results than in rules. "Excuse me, Colonel Watson," he said. "Very well, Doctor Parker?"

"Be so good as to have Propaganda announce that the hydrogen shell has been tried and found good. That because of military secrecy, its success has been withheld, and is being released now only because the public is not giving us the confidence we deserve."

"Why—why didn't you tell me before, Doctor Parker?"

"Because I am merely anticipating success by a few days. According to thermodynamic principles"—he reached for his slide rule, and without breaking into his discussion—"the expansion of the gas is at the rate of—"

"I would scarcely deny that, Doctor Parker. Please make yourself clear on just one point. You propose to announce that

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the shell is effective, a solution to our problem, and before a final proof is made?"

"Exactly, Your Excellency. Judging from reports, it will be too late if we follow the chronological order."

The President for once frowned. He turned from the visiphone and for a moment neither his face nor his voice was transmitted; only the blurred murmur of speech, and vague office sounds, fifteen hundred miles south. Then he flashed to the screen again: "If your slide rule convinces you that frozen hydrozen in small arms bullets will beat Saturnians, I shall consider the case proven. When do you leave for Saturn?"

"In less than forty-eight hours. The welding machines are working day and night, the reconditioning has gone unexpectedly well," Parker answered.

"When can we expect you to return?"

"When the Arch-Mogôk Thorgulu and his party are settled."

"Very well, Doctor Parker."

The visiphone screen went blank. Shadra cried, "Now you've done it! You didn't have to—"

"I did and I do have to go out and personally back this gamble. I certainly cannot send someone else out to test, in actual service, a practically unproved device."

"But you may not come back. It may not work."

Parker smiled. "In that case, my dear, the President would be so annoyed that I'd much prefer not to return. To say nothing of the roasting the scientific associations would give me."

"Oh." Shadra's voice and smile sharpened. "Well, just imagine how I'd feel, listening to the wives and lady friends of the association—not to mention the female scientists. So I am going with you."

Parker knew that he had been outmaneuvered without even having raised a slide rule in defense. So he said, "All right; after all, it has to work; and if we surprise the Saturnians, there will not be too much danger."

CHAPTER XXVII

GET THORGULU!

EVERY assembly plant in the north and south polar zones contributed its quota of finished space cruisers; and a South African development company surprised Parker at the last moment by supplying a synthetic fuel which, while not as efficient as the natural ore of Titan, was available in quantities sufficient to cram the bunkers of the entire fleet.

And within a few minutes of M-hour, the mobilized space fleet took off; long and fish-formed, outwardly duplicating the Saturnian pattern, as a matter of strategy; while as to equipment and operation details, there were differences aplenty.

Parker was in command of the fleet, as technical expert, and the rehabilitated *Karamânu* was his flagship. Her sister ships had plates of bronze-colored alloy, but as they cleared the Terrestrial atmosphere and got well into the spaceways, Parker pressed a signal button. With scarcely a split second delay, the entire fleet glowed blue-white.

"Effective, I think," he told Shadra. "Until the last moment, we look precisely like Saturnian ships. Then, to avoid confusion and the danger of blowing each other out of the ether, we switch on the color change beam. And if you'll notice, this is not stroboscopic!"

Shadra laughed. "If it hadn't been for the quiver of glow lamps at the plant, you might not have gotten the news until the following morning and no telling what might have happened."

She picked up a few yards of photovisotype tape and glanced at its text. "Your victory-to-be, and every Terrestrial town waiting for your triumphal return as if it had already been accomplished, is what staved off general revolution. Not just in South America, but all over."

So when Parker finally reached the Saturnian orbit, he had to win a victory that had been celebrated days before. The Terrestrial press correspondents had followed their usual routine of writing all the

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details of the battle before a shot was fired, and then doing two sets of statements of "far reaching results," according as the Terrestrians or the Saturnians actually won.

After centuries of practice, they had learned to claim, for instance, a brilliant victory and without any apparent inconsistency conclude with a summary of the number of human victims the defeated Saturnians expected each year.

. . . by forcing the Saturnians to take charge of all habitual criminals, the Terrestrians will solve two problems with one move. . . .

Hours later, when Parker had finally finished sending code messages to Terra, he saw from the space charts that the Titanian orbit was near. The executive officer reported by visiphone, "An unusual number of Saturnian cruisers has just been sighted by scouts. Contact is impending."

"When do we sight the Titanian slave pens?"

"A little after we see the Saturnian patrols. They are reported concentrating on that spot."

This unusual gathering of the enemy's ships demanded an immediate revision of Parker's plans, for to continue to Saturn and leave so strong a force behind the Terrestrian expedition would be a dangerous experiment. It did not take an expert in strategy to see how grave the risk would be.

Without any slide rule exercises, Parker could see that while an immediate attack on the presumably unguarded Saturnian capital might result in a signal victory, it might also be followed by a fatal attack from the rear, launched on a fleet temporarily disorganized by mopping up the vast spread of the city.

Parker said, "Keep me posted. We'll have to settled the Titanian patrols."

THE fleet swooped into the long night of Titan. Incoming reports from the scouts took more and more of Parker's time. In the signal compartment, busy operators were intercepting messages passing between units of the Saturnian squadrons.

With every moment, Parker realized more fully what a dangerous trap he had outwitted by his decision not to drive directly into the capital.

The visiphone transmitter kept him in personal touch with the commander of each Terrestrian cruiser, while Shadra was busy at the photo-visotype, which recorded the reports of the scouts. But before many minutes passed, this close coordination of so many units, arranged in such great depth, became impossible.

"*K-12*, engaging Saturnian cruiser!" a squadron commander reported. "*K-15* disabled but carrying on."

Parker's mouth tightened, and when he looked up, he saw that Shadra's face was white and tense. His smile was short and bleak. "This is what we have been working toward," he said, and snapped on the illuminated chart which filled all of the space on one bulkhead.

The ships were represented by moving spots of color. Each Terrestrian was now sending a radio beam whose fluctuations gave its position in space, while photo-electric cells "saw" and transmitted corresponding information on all enemy cruisers within their angle of vision.

The Terrestrian fleet had avoided the confusion of names. Each had a number, and the initial preceding was a designation of size or type. Each *K*, for instance, was modeled after the captured *Karamânu*, Parker's flagship.

K15's spot of color winked out. She might be a smoking ruin, her crew already blown apart by the escape of her atmosphere into the vaccum of space. Perhaps only the oscillation transmitter had been damaged. But now details of battle were out of Parker's hands. He could only draw inferences. *K-12* was engaging two Saturnians. One of them dropped out of the field of vision.

Parker wiped sweat from his forehead, for no one had time now to give him any

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details, and while he could follow the swoop and flash of each vessel, he could only guess what was happening in those encounters, until the disappearance of a color spot showed—

"Yes, but what? Destruction—flight—maneuver?"

"They know what they are doing, John. You went into that so often, in so many drills. Do sit down. It has to go out of your hands for the time. You can't personally pilot each cruiser."

Shadra was right. He had prepared the plans, and he had selected men to execute them; and now that the two fleets were clashing, he could do nothing but watch and wait, wait for the time to send the second and the third squadrons into action.

The *Karamânu's* signal crew was piecing together the intercepted messages. The Saturnians had been taken by surprise by the bronze color and the shape of the Terrestrian ships, and only when the leading squadron had blazed out blue-white did they fully realize that war had come home to them.

"These reports are confusing," the signal chief said. "The enemy speaks of Japetan ships slipping around the rear of their fleet. They seem to refer to us. No reference to Terrestrian forces."

Parker brightened. "So they are guessing? Try and find out how and when anyone on Japetus built enough ships to turn out the Saturnian navy."

The second squadron swooped down. In spite of the false perspective of a two-dimensional chart, Parker could visualize the neatness of the attack. The enemy, alarmed, were rising swiftly; they still seemed, as far as he could judge from their formation, unaware of the lurking second and third line of Terrestrian capital ships. Apparently they had believed when breaking through the *L* and *M* scouts that there was only one line of the powerful *K* ships.

PARKER switched to direct vision. The *Karamânu* was now so close to the center of action that moving chart devices could no longer cover the field, for their angles of photo-electric vision were not wide enough.

Lines of flame rippled through the gloom. The glow was reflected, bronze-colored. The opposing forces swooped, dipped, wheeled about to blast each other out of the air.

In an instant, Terrestrian and Saturnian ships looked so nearly alike that friends might shoot each other down through inability to keep track of their companion ships on the right and left.

Parker passed along the signal, and the Terrestrians' fluorescent paint film began to glow blue-white. Thus, at a glance, he could see how far his squadron had penetrated, how many were fighting, how many were crippled, how many were sinking in a trail of flame.

The signal crew chief returned: "We intercepted a message asking Kent Bradley to surrender, under threat of immediate annihilation. If he surrenders, he gets a safe conduct to Japetus or Terra."

"What?"

The chief repeated the message. "There is no chance of a mistake. Bradley said—"

"Well, what did he say?" Parker demanded, when the man hesitated. "Bradley's alive! Bradley's revolting. What did he say?"

"Uh—well— Beg your pardon, sir, but these are the words he used—" The chief blurted it out, and it was impressive.

The precise scientist forgot discipline and slapped the man on the back. "Absolutely authentic! He would put it that way."

Shadra looked puzzled. "I never heard words like those. What do they mean? I thought you'd taught me English."

"Er—it's a peculiar dialect they speak in Bradley's state," Parker said. Then, to the signal chief, "Get me more of it! Who is the Saturnian? Can you arrange a direct hook-up?"

"Yes, sir. Thorgulu, the Arch-Mogôk, speaking to Kent Bradley. At once, sir."

He ran from the compartment. Parker dashed after him. "Get the right band and

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tell Bradley not to surrender, not to make any terms, but to hang on."

While waiting, Parker ordered the commander of the third squadron into action. "I know we ought to keep a reserve, but go in anyway! Kent Bradley and some Japeton rebels are fighting off all the Saturnians. We have to help them make the most of their attempt."

He cut the visiphone and then turned to Shadra. "Imagine it: Bradley, stealing or building ships, leading a revolt instead of going to the ovens. That is why there is a concentration of Saturnians, and that is why we were able to steal up on them. They were expecting more reinforcements from the capital to help subdue rebel slaves."

The visiphone pilot light blinked red, and Parker cut in again. The screen clouded, then blurred colors took shape; the signal chief had tuned in the Saturnian wave band.

Thorgulu's ruddy face and sharp nose and blazing eyes filled the screen, and his harsh voice made the transmitter crackle: "If you don't accept my offer right now, I'll get you even if you are hiding in ravines, I'll blast down every peak and flatten the country, you—"

Then Kent Bradley came back at him. Parker chuckled. The signal chief had not exaggerated. "Very unscientific, but forceful." Parker pressed a button, and turned to a local circuit's transmitter.

When the executive officer's face appeared in the screen, Parker said, "Tell *KK-5* to take command of operations. The *Karamânu* is to follow radio beam directions and get direct contact with the ship of Thorgulu."

"But you can't," the officer protested. "You can't turn over command in the midst of an action like this. I'll send a cruiser, several cruisers—"

"I can and I am going to," Parker cut in. "Tell *KK-5* to take over. He helped me draft the plans, and if he does not know them as well as I do, someone should convene a court martial."

The officer saluted. Shadra asked, "John, what are you planning now? Do you mean to say you are going to go after Thorgulu as a private and personal adventure?"

"I am going to hunt that fellow down and make an example of him, but not as a personal adventure. It just happens that the *Karamânu* is the only ship equipped to pick out and follow Thorgulu's ship in all these hundreds milling around. There is no time to waste. Are there any other questions?"

Before Shadra had a chance to think of any, Parker went down the passage that led to the bridge. Slide rule work had its limit. Kent Bradley's gallant defiance had made Parker forget that he was a calm and cold-blooded scientist.

"Carry on," he said to the executive officer. "All you have to do is find Thorgulu's ship, and blow it out of the air. Chase him to Pluto and beyond if necessary."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THEY'LL LIKE VEGETABLES

THE action had become general. The upper air of Titan was a tri-dimensional traffic jam of ships, wreckage, and scout patrols dashing crazily among the heavy cruisers. The *Karamânu* ploughed through the confusion; and then for deadly instants she was in a zone of cross fire, as liable to destruction by friend as by enemy.

"Is the man crazy?" Shadra gasped, as a sharp turn flung her against a bulkhead. "We're dropping."

"Diving under power." Parker paused to glance at an instrument panel to verify this. "Thorgulu must be close to the surface of the satellite."

Shadra had turned to a port, and her face was pressed against the thick pane. "I can see the domed gardens and slave pens, the light of them, miles of them But it's foggy."

"Smoke," Parker corrected. "Searchlights over here. Reaching through. Ground searchlights. Flame from the ground—*look!*"

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A long wavering line of fire rippled red through the swirling vapors that blanketed the face of Titan and made the glow of its domed city seem further away than the instruments indicated. An explosion blotted out half of the familiar curve of the airlock where Saturnian space cruisers docked.

In a few seconds, Parker was certain that an unheard-of thing had happened: fighting on foot, between Saturnians and slaves—slaves, and their Japetan allies.

Now the *Karamânu* was far below the dog fight of mid-space. She skimmed low, swerved to avoid a tall tower which buttressed the domed city of Titan. The pilot said, "The ground is covered with ships, and our infra-red 'eyes' indicate large bodies of men maneuvering on foot, and in the ravines beyond the city."

He was getting this from a receiver clamped to one ear, but visual verification was available. He touched a switch, and Parker saw figures on a screen: the weird distortion of fog-penetrating infra-red converted into visual wave lengths.

There was no doubt about it; tall Saturnians fumed and smoked in their space suits, and hordes of Titanians attacked them, singled them out, cornered them, overwhelmed them with devices whose gush of fumes soon blocked out even the infra-red rays.

Then the pilot shouted, "We've got him! Thorgulu's ship!"

He twisted the controls. This time Parker and Shadra had snapped on safety belts, or they would have been crushed against the bulkhead. Ahead, a great bronze-hued ship swooped out of the mist. The signal chief reported to the bridge, "Thorgulu's long-range communication system is out of commission. As nearly as we can make out from intercepted local messages, he is going to Saturn for reinforcements."

"Like hell he is!" Parker yelled. "More speed!"

No coördinated details from the satellite were available, nor were the messages exchanged between the *KK-5*, now flagship, and the cruisers in action, clear enough to give a picture of what actually was happening around the domed city of Titan, and in the deep ravines. But soon it was certain that the Saturnian fleet was beginning to lose. The only query was, "When do we win?"

"No, that's not the only question," Parker said. "Indeed, there are several more. First, how did Bradley fare, and second, is Thorgulu racing for reinforcements he can't summon otherwise, or is he merely trying to escape?"

The probability was that he needed reinforcements, or wished to take a warning to Saturn. The Arch-Mogôk's valor had never been questioned.

THORGULU swooped up and through the confusion of cruisers. He would have made a clean escape but for the radio beam reflection from his hull, for the dense smoke rising from the satellite's face made all ships look alike. The *Karamânu* put on more and more power as there were fewer maneuvering ships; but Thorgulu was losing no time.

"That's the fastest ship the Saturnians have," Shadra said.

"It is a long way to Saturn," Parker answered. Then, seeing that the satellite was already far behind, he asked the signal chief, "Any reports of the battle on Titan?"

"At B-hour plus twenty-nine, the Third Squadron started out to meet any possible Saturnian reinforcements, or to shell the capital. The Third was not needed in the action over Titan."

"Good for *KK-5!*"

Ahead, Saturn loomed up larger against the blackness, white and shimmering, its ring an arch of stardust and star fragments and vapor. Mists blanketed the planet's face, and only radio or infra-red could penetrate deeply enough to pick out the Saturnian capital.

Thorgulu's ship was losing speed. The flame from her repulsion tubes was irregular. The uneven propulsion made her twist and swerve crazily in her course. Parker

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pressed a button, and the *Fire at Will* signal flashed in each gun turret.

The *Karamânu* shuddered, and for all her insulation, the navigation compartment quivered from the blast. One of the shells grazed Thorgulu's ship, and fire streamed far after her. The Arch-Mogôk answered, and then both ships settled down to maneuver; flight and pursuit were for the moment over: for one of the combatants, perhaps permanently.

"You and I watch, now," Parker said, glumly. "Slide rules are of no use."

Shadra's tense face relaxed in a smile. "Don't feel that way, John. Your calculations made all this possible."

The ring of Saturn now blocked out all the further stars and the blackness beyond. Thorgulu had to swoop sharply upward, or dive almost straight down and into the vapor blanket. The *Karamânu* flattened out to block that last move, and a broadside blasted up at the fugitive's hull. A gush of flame and a surge of smoke indicated a shattered compartment.

In open space, Thorgulu would still have had at least an even chance; but with his erratic propulsion and the deadly barrier of fragments that whirled with the vapors of Saturn's ring, his only choice was a steep upward swoop.

Parker reached for the visiphone and spun the dials. This was the first time in many months that he had direct speech with Thorgulu. "Surrender, as a hostage to guarantee good behavior of all Saturnians," Parker said to the Arch-Mogôk, "or we'll blow you to pieces."

"Come and get me!" Flame and smoke obscured the visiphone screen, and almost blotted out the Saturnian's sharp, red face. "We do not surrender."

The half-crippled ship still had some artillery in action. A crashing and grinding broke communication for dragging seconds. One of the *Karamânu's* gun turrets was disabled by a shell. Thorgulu, still at the visiphone, yelled, "How do you like that? Come nearer and take us!"

"Our fleet is shelling your capital," Parker said. "And not all the smoke in your compartment is your breath. Your ship is breaking up, and your fuel bunkers are leaking."

The screen went blank. Fumes enveloped the Saturnian ship. Aboard the *Karamânu*, the maintenance crew raced about with welding equipment to patch the bent and torn armor of the jammed turret. At the same time, the other turrets continued their fire, pouring shells into the spreading cloud of smoke. The dense fumes were reaching out to the planet's whirling ring, and blending with it.

THEN Parker saw how Thorgulu had tricked him. Rather than surrender, he had thrown out a smoke screen and now his ship was heading straight for the planet's outer ring; straight into destruction, for the thickest armor could not endure the combined impact of the millions of solid particles which mingled with the vapor and dust that made the fifty-mile thickness of Saturn's girdle.

There was a green blaze of vaporized metal, spreading so bright and broad that for seconds no one aboard the *Karamânu* could see the white of the planet's face. The space ship's hull had vanished from the shock of meeting all the meteorites in that band of planetary dust.

"The bravest of all those stiff-necked Saturnians," Parker said, when his eyes recovered from the glare. "Suicide, but not surrender."

Shadra's cry made him shake off the mood brought on by Thorgulu's gallant end. "Brave, but cunning! Look—over there."

Her voice made Parker and the pilot snap back to the instruments. A small, gleaming hull whisked from the edge of the smoke screen; the lower edge of the obscuring cloud from which Thorgulu's cruiser had dashed headlong into the ring of Saturn. The *Karamânu* swerved, and Parker shouted the bearings of the new target.

Thorgulu, he was certain, must be in that small life boat with the survivors of his crew. But the *Karamânu's* fire was

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wasted on such a small target. "Dive after him," Parker shouted. "Don't let him reach the vapor blanket! Keep him from the capital!"

Then Parker saw the final display of Saturnian courage. The life boat headed for the space between the concentric rings. She zigzagged and vanished. Pursuit was impossible, for no ship the size of the *Karamânu* could risk the deadliness of that seemingly clear zone between the outer and inner ring of Saturn.

The *Karamânu* depressed her nose and swooped down into the planet's vapor blanket. There was no way of learning whether Thorgulu's insane valor had ended in a burst of flame, or whether he had worked his way through the fifty-mile depth and to the other side of the ring.

One thing however was certain: in that light space-launch, Thorgulu could not travel fast enough to warn the capital.

And when the *Karamânu* leveled off in the steaming atmosphere of Saturn, Parker easily located the capital. There was sullen glow, a crisscrossing of searchlights, and a circling of space cruisers whose fluorescent blue-white identified them. The third squadron's work was almost over.

The mushrooms of dust and colored flame slowly settled down to the level of the dust which shrouded the domes and pinnacles of the Saturnian capital. Parker signaled the *KK-5*, and in a moment, the squadron commander reported, "We are preparing to land and mop up the city. The population has revolted, and all the leaders are barricaded in the citadel. Hydrogen shells are going to get their trial."

The *Karamânu* landed and her crew turned out with small arms. Parker went with the landing party. Shoulder to shoulder, shambling in heavily insulated suits, the Terrestrians crossed the smoking square. Saturnians charged from the citadel; hard-shells, defiant to the last, unable to believe that invaders could meet them and their gusts of flame face to face.

The hydrogen bullets stopped them. First the cold beyond any Saturnian imagination; then the expansion as the solid gas became liquid, and the liquid, hundreds of degrees below zero, began to boil and expand. The action was instantaneous, explosive, and each Saturnian became a bomb that burst. The flames that followed, almost on the very impact and burst, were really the aftermath, the fierce combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

But the Saturnian targets were already beyond any appreciation of the blaze that roared down their lines, wherever a Terrestrian bullet hit. They turned and fled, bewildered by the alternation of icy gusts and bursts of fire.

"They're working," Parker shouted behind his gas mask, and reloaded his hydrogen pistol. "I'm right, I was right, it's just as I calculated."

The survivors of the sortie reached their red hot palace. It was not until the story of Thorgulu's defeat and probable destruction was confirmed by his failure to reach the citadel that the stubborn defenders surrendered.

Revolt, the disappearance of the Arch-Mogôk, the terror of frozen hydrogen, cracked their stubborn spirits. Parker said to the commander of the *KK-5*, "It's all done; they are resigned to a vegetable diet. Carry on. I have to go to Titan and find out about Kent Bradley."

CHAPTER XXIX

BACK TO A BUDGET

WHEN Ion pointed at the sheets of flame far up in the Titanian stratosphere, and shouted, "Revolution in Saturn! Civil war!" I called it wishful thinking. His guess didn't sound reasonable until I remembered the disabled ship I had seen on our return from taking Valene from her captors; a large one, bronze-colored, like the vessel that had carried Parker and me from Terra.

It was followed by similar ships in wedge formation, and far behind that squadron I saw the glow of what must be propulsion tubes. It made me think of the flicker and waver of Terrestrial north-

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ern lights; and trying to estimate the size of the successive waves was no job for this tense moment.

Apparently Saturnian ships were shooting each other down. I could now hear the dull rumble and roaring as the battle came into the thin upper atmosphere. There was a crashing and grinding; great cruisers lost way, began to spin and fall, smashing into each other, and flames stretched out like the tails of comets. A gun turret, blasted out of place, shook the earth when it fell into the twisted girders of the air-dock.

If this was revolution, no wonder Thorgulu wanted to compromise; no wonder he did not want our Japetan ships to counter-attack, with all that hell above him. Why there should be revolt in Saturn might be learned by the survivors of this insane tangle among the crags of Titan; but—

"Look—look at the blue ships!"

Ion's shout accompanied a strange sight: even as I looked up into the grinding and whirling tangle, wondering whether wild shots from the maneuvering cruisers would not do more damage to us than the direct efforts of our enemies, I saw a score of bronze-colored ships turn a dazzling blue-white.

No signal could have caused such instant execution of an order to remove camouflage; some high-frequency impulse released from a master-oscillator must have activated the fluorescent pigments that covered the vessels whose color had changed.

Fluorescent? It had to be; nothing else could explain the peculiar wavering and ripple of the light that made the newcomers stand out against the black sky, against the smoke, and against the dust that rose in clouds when shells missed their aerial targets and exploded against the crags of Titan, or buried themselves in the soil and blew up tall geysers of fragments.

This change of color made the whole confusion clear. I caught Ion's arm and yelled, "See it? All the blues are one fleet. It makes sense; see them gang up on the bronze? A surprise trick—they didn't show their color until there was danger of friends' shooting each other down in the tangle!"

Ion began dancing around and waving his arms and yelling. The Titanians and Japetans nearest him passed the word along. I shouted, "Nail the Saturnians before they can get the rest of their ships off the ground. Don't let them join those in the air!"

That color change must be one of John Parker's carefully calculated devices. Parker, back from Terra, had come to clean house on Titan. A slide rule was on the warpath now, and the Saturnian fleet milled about, not yet recovered from the confusion.

WE BROKE into a run. The Saturnians, heading for the cruisers still lined up on the plain, saw us approach and wheeled to meet us. Acid projectors coughed their charges into the solid rank. The enemy outnumbered us, but they could not ignore the threat; particularly not with the roar and terror overhead. Whatever communication the fleet had with the ground could not be helpful, for things were happening too rapidly for signal crews to maintain anything like coordination. It was each ship for itself.

Hampered by their insulated suits, the Saturnians could not move quickly enough to spread out and overwhelm us by sheer weight.

The more aggressive Titanians saw their chance. They poured out of the hothouse. They snatched metal fragments from the hangar wreckage and belabored their oppressors from the rear. The blows did little damage, but the jagged bludgeons slashed the Saturnian insulation and let the biting chill sink in.

For every Saturnian who took it on the chin, a score of slaves dropped, scorched and stifled; but inspired frenzy made newcomers join the battle. They had seen one small victory, and they were going wild.

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In the meanwhile, hell was whirling above us. The overhead battle made the sky a solid sheet of flame and glittering metal. We could now distinguish the pursuing ships from the Saturnian fugitives. Color and contour made that simple. Blue-white hulls rammed those with bronze plates.

Overwhelming force and superior numbers were telling. Saturnian ships crashed against far-off peaks; geysers of flame rose. Others were forced down by sheer weight. Their crews raced across the plain. And the Terrestrians landed. They came out in grotesque armor that made them look like deep-sea divers.

Our surprise party merged with the ever-increasing ranks of the Terrestrians. Isolated groups, fighting it out to a finish, dissolved in spurts of flame and gusts of acid. A few of the ships on the ground, despite our attempt to cut off the crews, took the air. And then the scattered clusters of Saturnians and Terrestrians tightened into lines.

OUR allies from home had a weapon that made acid projectors seem crude and ineffective. They fired bullets whose effect was dazzling; the fire-breathing Saturnians burst like bombs. There was a blinding sheet of flame, and the monster was gone. This was fighting the devil with fire!

I'd heard of that, but here it was, a figure of speech put into real and terrible practice.

The battle in the air was over. A pursuit squadron had headed for Saturn; whether to meet reinforcements, or to carry war to the heart of the Saturnian power, I couldn't guess. The week-long Titanian gloom was shaking with roars and rumbles and explosions; dark masses of our allies loomed up here and there against the bursts of flames that marked

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the end of another cornered group of the enemy.

A few Terrestrian cruisers circled overhead, in mid-space, while others, just visible, patrolled the stratosphere; their readiness to observe and give the alarm added to the uncertainty, the eeriness of the madman's battle on the dark plains of Titan, and in the ragged ranges and deep ravines that seamed the satellite.

One by one, the Terrestrian cruisers not on patrol duty landed near the airlock, and their crews joined the widely scattered landing parties.

A courier was despatched to Japetus, for even with a possible counter-attack, we felt that we could spare one light cruiser to let the council of the further satellite share our triumph.

Hours passed before the mopping up was completed. Rather than surrender, many of the Saturnians plunged into deep ravines, and rising flames, soon extinguished, told how the Titanian chill had finished these obstinate fighters.

I hurried back to the domed city with Ion, for we both wanted a complete picture of what had been going on all around us.

A Terrestrian officer was checking up on ships absent, ships accounted for, ships demolished in action; it was still too soon to begin mustering the crews. He looked up from his desk in the flagship of the squadron that had made the first contact. He chewed a cigar, his lean face twitched, and his hand shook as he said, "I guess you're Bradley. Your friend, Doctor Parker—"

"Slide Rule Parker?" I forced a grin and tried to wisecrack.

The officer nodded.

"Right. Turned command over to *KK-5*, after saying that he was chasing Thorgulu to Pluto and beyond, if necessary. He was not with the second squadron that went to bombard the Saturnian capital, and so far, we have not had any word of him."

Valene had rejoined me after order had been restored. "Try and get in touch! If he's lost, the victory is half wasted. If it hadn't been for him, not many of us would be here."

The officer sighed and shook his head. "Sit down and wait. Messages are coming in right along."

But there was no message to warn us of Parker's landing. Probably it had never occurred to him that anyone was particularly interested in his personal doings. Valene and I bobbed up from the bench and ran to the grounded cruiser's porthole when we heard the whine and hissing of another ship landing.

Flood lights played on it. A hatch opened. The officer looked up again from his work and said, "That's the *Karamânu*, Parker's flagship."

"Thanks a lot," I said. "Maybe if you went along, you could point Parker out to me; I'd love to have his autograph."

I caught Valene's hand and dragged her across the debris-littered landing field. The officer, I noted as we both stumbled and landed in a heap, was back at his work.

THEN I saw Parker. He halted as he reached the end of the gang plank. We faced each other, trying to think of something to say. He wore his usual unpressed tweeds.

The blonde who clung to his arm was wearing the first Terrestrian ensemble I'd seen in a long time, and she seemed to think Parker was well dressed. Her nose was smudged, and her bottle green outfit had suffered from the lack of space that goes with space travel, but she looked almost as good as Valene.

He poked out his hand, and then I thought of a brilliant greeting. "Hi, John. What'd you burn those Saturnians with? The landing parties did a nice job—slide rule stuff?"

A grin spread all over Parker's weary face. I could see he had lost a lot of weight and sleep. He answered, "Liquid hydrogen. Very simple. The intense cold froze their internal organs. Then the sudden expansion—"

Instinctively, he fumbled for the slide

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rule always in his pocket. "It released—"

"Never mind the B.T.U.'s," I cut in, and grabbed his hand. "Who's the girl friend?"

So I met Shadra, and then I learned that she knew Valene. Though all this took time. It was difficult to talk sense, and we did not succeed. Valene and I listened to Parker's account of what had happened back on earth; how the invention of projectiles that would go through magnetic repulsion screens had won the first advantage over the invaders, and how the liquid hydrogen bullets for small arms had solved the problem of fighting the devil with fire.

"What's the next act, John?" I asked him.

He sighed wearily, dug out a crumpled pack of cigarettes, and offered me one. Shadra, the devoted girl friend, found her monogrammed lighter; as a Terrestrian, she was a natural. "I always lose mine," Parker said, when she flicked the release. "So she's tracking along so I won't waste so much time hunting it."

"For a scientist," I said, "you've done pretty well. You act almost human."

Shadra smiled and looked pleased with herself, then offered me the lighter. Valene's eyes became round as saucers. She'd never seen a cigarette smoked, and she wondered if I was going Saturnian.

"Don't worry, darling," I told her. "Where you're going, you'll have to learn the trick yourself."

But the funny thing of it was, that long-anticipated cigarette was no treat at all. I dropped it on the deck and tramped on it. Then I said, "John, where we going from here?"

"Back to Terra. We've shelled the Saturnian capital and the taste of hydrogen bullets broke their courage; cracked them far in excess of the actual casualties."

"They tell me you lit out to nail Thorgulu."

"We did not capture him," Parker said, wearily. "He dropped a smoke screen, and while we were looking for the cruiser he abandoned, Thorgulu slipped out in a space-launch, right for the space between the rings of Saturn. We could not follow, and we saw no sign to tell us whether his light boat was smashed or whether he made the almost impossible passage. But regardless of that, he is marooned in space if he continues his flight; and if he tries to go home, he'll be imprisoned."

"Why? A brave fighter, I'd say. For an enemy, a pleasant chap."

Parker explained: "That is what his late friends said; but after we trounced them and blew half of their capital around their shoulders, and introduced them to Terrestrially frozen hydrogen, they remembered that he had pioneered these raids and so they want no more of him."

"He's the goat, eh?"

"Certainly. These Saturnians do have human traits. In a way, one could almost be sorry for him. A great leader, but he undertook just one enterprise too many. Very much like the crop of dictators who were bent on saving Terra by paying the Saturnians a tribute of 'subnormal' humans. I am sure you see the great possibilities such a plan offered a ruling clique which had enemies to dispose of."

THIS told me that Terra had been playing pretty much true to form. When Parker went on to assure me that the various saviors of the people probably were now in secure jails to protect them from their public, I asked, "How come? The news of this battle can't be in Terra already."

Parker's long face twisted in a grin, and he actually winked as he answered, "The newscasting services announced the unqualified success of the hydrogen shells before we left Terra. Probably they announced the capture of Thorgulu."

This was too much for me. I could not imagine precise and scientific Parker faking a story, and he had already told me that this Titanian battle had been the first test of the hydrogen projectile. He saw my amazement, and forestalled my question.

All he did was take his slide rule from

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the pocket of his greasy vest; he tapped the case, and said, "It was mathematically inevitable, and so I reported success. The wiping out of the Saturnian garrison in northern Mexico could not have taken place until a week after we took to space. More ships had to be built, for I needed every one I could get."

I did not ask him how he knew that Saturnian headquarters in the Western Hemisphere had actually been blown out of existence. He would have just strutted that slip-stick and looked omniscient. Not that I begrudged him a bit of shining in the reflected splendor of calculus, but there were other things to discuss.

Among these were the details of the negotiations with the Saturnians who had survived the attack on their capital. Parker concluded these with his usual dry precision, and then said, "I think, Bradley, that you would find it tiresome to commute between Japetus and Terra. Well—"

"I'd love it," Valene cut in.

"What I meant was," he went on, "that the best way to remove temptation from the Saturnians is transport the slaves of the satellite and the free people of Japetus back to their forgotten home on Terra. We have such a large fleet that not too many trips would be necessary."

"Your friend," Valene said, "is almost as smart as you are, darling. That's a perfectly wonderful idea. And if Shadra can get used to those funny clothes, I'm sure I can."

And that's the way it worked out. She did get used to those funny clothes. It keeps me broke buying her new ones. And Parker, having learned a lot of things his original scholarship had not included, has a similar report. He's invented a slide rule with setting for working out a household budget.

THE END

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The Readers' Viewpoint

WE HAPPEN to know that Robert Carse's "Street of Swords" is an exceptionally authoritative story. In preparing to write it Mr. Carse did a lot of careful research, having access to a rare library of New Orleans history. Moreover, he gathered all the information he could on the complicated tradition and technique of dueling. Fencers tell us that it takes years of practice for a man to understand thoroughly the various weapons. Probably so; but at any rate Mr. Carse did everything possible—short of challenging somebody.

Here is a word of appreciation from the author himself.

ROBERT CARSE

I wish here to give thanks to those who aided me in my background material for "Street of Swords." First and foremost, I must express gratitude to Mr. Giorgio Santelli of the Salle Santelli, who not only gave me of his own personal knowledge as one of the world's finest fencers, but lent to me several books from his very valuable collection on dueling and swordplay.

Once more, as she has done so often in the past, Miss Mildred Keenan came to my aid with works from her broad library, and in particular extremely rare books on New Orleans and Louisianan history of the period in which my story is placed.

As a sort of small personal note—my grandfather, Thomas Carse, was one of the men to build the first railroad west of the Mississippi in the years preceding the Civil War. I guess the idea for "Street of Swords" has been with me for quite a time.

NEW YORK CITY

STILL on the subject of Robert Carse, we now turn you over to a gentleman who knows about Scotch dialect. He sends along a poem of his, and we are going to see that Mr. Carse writes it out thirty times on the blackboard, because he made an error in "Rebel Take Arms."

DARWIN KELLOGG PAVEY

I am just reading "Rebel Take Arms," by Robert Carse. I see he makes the same mistake I did when I first tried to put my small knowledge of the Scotch dialect into verse. I used the word *tae*, which really means toe, for the English word to. I was corrected by a Scotchman in New York. It is an easy mistake to make, even by one who could speak the dialect fairly well, as I once could, lang syn. Here is my poem, as corrected and accepted for publication:—

Abuse Frae the Unco Guid

What matter? Atheist's but a name;
Agnostic's maist the vera same,
The twa fu equal tak the blame,
Maist ony day;
The maist important thing's the game,
Na' what they say.

Abuse frae a' the unco guid,
Their scraichin' hate an' manners rude
Gies but contempt, na' gratitude;
Maks waur, if fey:
'Twad freeze wi' cauld my vera bluid,
If saved that way.

I wad the Pow'r that brought me here
My molecules an' atoms stear
Far frae the pastures an' the gear,
Whare saunts may range:
There wad be waur than it is here,
Unless they change.

When I remember Frank A. Munsey through the passing years, I seem to obtain added light on him, his ideals and objectives. Unusual among publishers, he didn't seem to be actuated by gain, but to make others happy and spread the blessing of good literature amongst the impecunious. He knew that the poor could not pay 25, 35 to 50¢ for a good magazine. Hail to his memory!

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

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OUR next correspondent has some interesting ratings to offer. He has classified the stories as well as rated them, and we'll expect to hear what other readers think of the results.

JOE HERZOG

I have read almost every magazine on the newsstands and I am positive that ARGOSY is the best. I have read ARGOSY for over a year and have induced two of my friends to try the magazine. They are now constant readers.

I will attempt to classify the best stories and authors in the fantastic, Western, costume, mystery, adventure and comedy fields since September 5, 1939.

Western:
1. Rawhide Road.....Foster
2. Brothers of the Gun.....Coburn
3. The Whisper Trail.....Coburn
4. Guns on Fire.....Byrne
5. Watered Guns.....Coburn

Best authors: Foster, Coburn, Byrne, Shaw

Costume:
1. Seal of Treason.....Montgomery
2. The Devil's Doubloons.....McCulley
3. Rakehelly Ride.....Montgomery
4. Don Renegade.....McCulley

Best authors: McCulley, Montgomery and Horn

Fantastic:
1. The Golden Boneyard.....Reed
2. Lords of Creation.....Binder
3. Star Bright.....Williamson
4. Minions of Mercury.....Beyer
5. Minions of Mars.....Beyer
6. Let 'Em Eat Space.....Beyer
7. The World That Drowned.....Painton
8. The Golden Empress.....Painton

Best authors: Binder, Beyer, Reed, Williamson, and Painton

Mystery:
1. The Sun Sets at Five.....Chase
2. Loot Lies Deep.....E. Adams
3. All at Once No Alice.....Woolrich
4. Beauty and the Feast.....Daly
5. The Green Flame.....North

Best authors: Chase, Daly, E. Adams and Woolrich

Adventure:
1. The Harp and the Blade.....Myers (Best of 1940)
2. Too Tough to Fight.....Kearns
3. Wilderness Way.....Kearns
4. Sons of the Tall Timber.....Pierce
5. The Flying Irishman.....Chamberlain

Best authors: Myers, Kearns, Pierce and Chamberlain

Comedy:
1. Buckshot for Henry.....Tuttle
2. Thirty Days for Henry.....Tuttle
3. Suicide Sid.....Sullivan
4. F. O. B. Disaster.....Sullivan
5. Move Over, Neptune.....Sullivan

Best authors: Tuttle, Sullivan

PHILADELPHIA, PENNA.

LOOKING AHEAD!

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It's easy enough to call them fools, those crazy, reckless men who ruled the American airways in the twenties. They wanted danger for company; and if any man spoke of safety for flyers, they branded him a coward. But remember that they were the pioneers; remember that their daring conquered the skyways. Beginning a magnificent novel by

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BLADES OF INTRIGUE

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MURRAY R. MONTGOMERY

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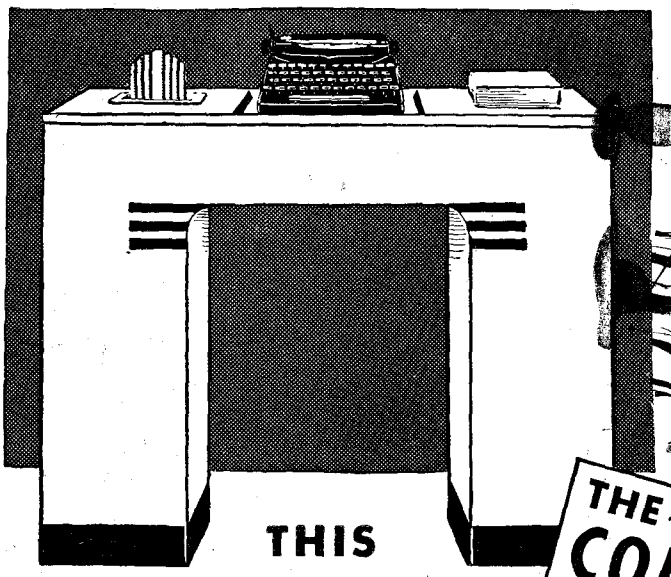

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SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Deluxe Portable—standard 4-r… keyboard; back spacer; …in…s and marg… e; double shift key; two-color …on and automa… reverse; variable line spacer; …gers; makes as many as seven carbons; tabs… wide; writes lines 8.2" wide, black …letters, rubber cushioned feet.

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…Deluxe Portable Typewriter… money-back guarantee. If, after … days, you are not entirely satisfied, we will take … and refunding your … risk.

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